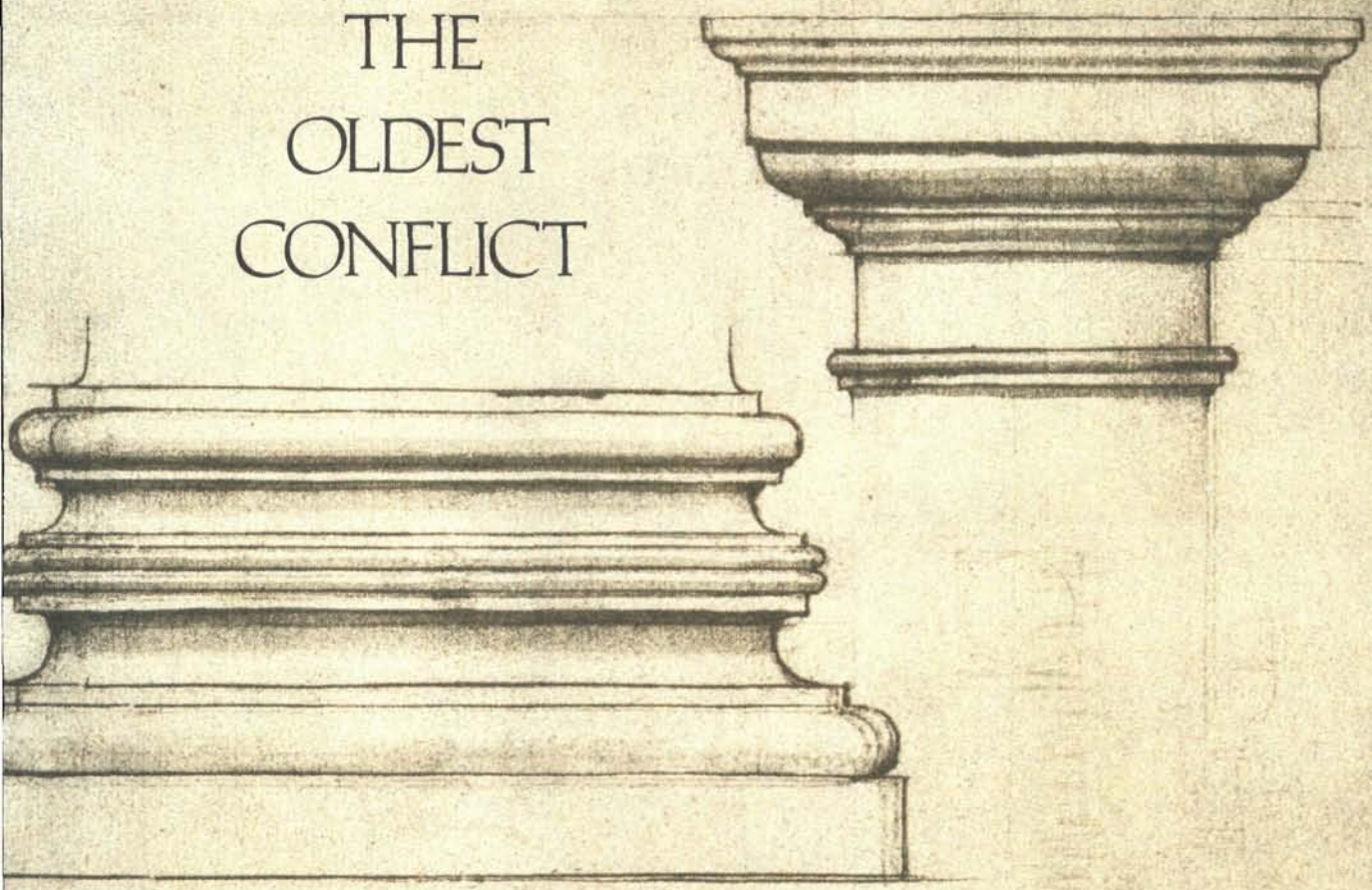
THE OLDEST CONFLICT



Chronicles of Culture

Volume 3, Number 3 May/June 1979

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Editor's Comment

"It's most frequently in the
name of man's natural goodness
that people have been slaughtered."
—Anatole France

The oldest conflict never abates. It never gets better or worse, only more bizarre with each passing decade. It is updated in form and sound, never in essence. The American Civil Liberties Union, a noble institution in name and intention, these days defends the Nazis' right to march and speak, and fights against Christmas carol singing in primary schools. The ACLU leaders declare themselves rationalists, but come across as possessed by scholastic frenzy: they discuss, with learned zeal, how many guardian angels of democracy should dance on the pinhead of the First Amendment. No one seems to care about the simple fact that Nazis preach hatred and Christmas carols love. The arcane subtlety of interpretation turns into legality, which consequently becomes rabid orthodoxy and paves the way for violence and evil.

The oldest conflict always involves good sense, under ever-changing appellations. Not long ago, the *Progressive,* a journal from Madison, Wisconsin which is devoted to friendliness toward everyone who hates the American social system, decided to publish the blueprint for the hydrogen bomb. The editors contended that the technical data for its manufacture would enlighten the public opinion and give it new moral and political perspectives. In their opinion, the details of construction could shape the state of public conscience. Now, the conscience of a procommunist, leftist or socialist in America is quite a simple device: it tells him that everything that's bad for America is *a priori* good in general. Thus, when Carter administration officials with impeccable liberal credentials, like Secretary of State Vance and Defense Secretary Brown (who is a nuclear scientist to boot), opposed the publication of the *Progressive's* atomic manual for national security reasons, they were accused of brutal censorship by those who eagerly support regimes in the world that muzzle the press and rule by censorship. An old anecdote comes to mind: In the fifties, during the war games in Byelorussia, an American military attaché was surprised by the unexpected maneuverability of the Russian tanks, which he had previously thought to be an American technical secret; during a break, he toasted a Russian officer, saying: "You have excellent spy service!" The Russian lifted his vodka and replied: "No, you have excellent technological magazines." The editors of the *Progressive* won't ever believe, much less give heed to the fact, that at the hub of every intelligence unit at every Russian, Czech, Bulgarian, etc. embassy and U.N. mission in America there is a room where many people feverishly clip excerpts from American publications, mostly of hobbies, crafts, specialized industries, and hurriedly ship these precious scraps to their analytical centers in Moscow, Prague, Sofia, etc. One of my friends, asked after several years in Russian labor camps what he had learned there about marxism, answered: "There is a strange logic in this faith which makes a utopian into an idiot and a torturer once he enters reality." Utopians always know better.

Trying to interfere in the oldest conflict is becoming increasingly difficult as diverse forces are at work denying its existence. The national debate on modern man and woman, their moral, mental and emotional equipment, is ruthlessly monopolized by those who, a couple of decades ago, were busy discussing society and its mechanics, and did not give a damn for the individual. What caused the switch? What made them leap frantically into therapies, prescriptions, soul-engineering, rigidly imposed theories for how to live and love? Perhaps the human being's resistance to the liberal ideas of society, social schemes, models of life; maybe the recalcitrance and waywardness of human nature that resists packaging and balks at barren formulas. Thus, instead of discussing *homo,* his needs and frailties, the liberal autocrats of culture promote permissive attitudes as a substitute for failed social solutions. It's a form of the oldest conflict —indomitable individualism is countered with the ideology of indifference to social obligations.

Thereby culture that can be justly termed "liberal" goes full circle in making Western man weaker and his civilization sleazier. How can we reclaim our values? Certainly not through legislatures, administrations, communal assemblies —in short: politics. That brings the fight into the rings and stadiums of the evening news, fashionable poses, social moods and sympathies, and TV sitcoms. Cultural influences and powers can be contested only by opposing cultural forces. It's not easy. Our time sees no honor in fairness. When amorality, vulgarity and egocentrism of liberal life styles begin to emanate an odor of rot, palpably endangering the very health of the society, those who did everything to infect the social body with decay refuse to bear their responsibility. This is where the oldest conflict becomes opaque: the side that controls the media, as the liberals do, has nothing to fear. The media, the cradle of programmatic amorality, operate on a principle of fake innocence that can never be proven to be a fraud; they refuse to be held accountable for their deeds and for the putridity they inject into the nation. They do not admit errors, regardless of their nature and dimension. Wielding an absolute power in the domain of culture through the total submission of the opinion-making industry, and making an effective critique of the liberal aberration impossible, liberals enjoy a temporary edge in the oldest conflict. They do not notice that this state of affairs transforms them into outright totalitarians—which is our historical chance, for being antiliberal increasingly means being antitotalitar-

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ian, while the conflict is old and will last long. They can call us names; invectives cannot dissipate the smell of totalitarianism.

In fact, what most trenchantly divides *us* from *them* today is *their* bigotry. We believe, with the Founding Fathers, that courteous pluralism graces society and remains our most cherished tradition, that there's valor and common good in respect for the other person's view, and in the diversity of ideas and their interplay. The existence of the *New York Times,* Irving Howe, and even Professor Galbraith, to our mind, enriches us all. We admire their intellectual and professional prowess. In return we live with a constant feeling —which emanates from the plethora of words, both written and spoken, and images that together constitute culture according to the liberal gospel—that a liberal sees us as a sort of carcinogenic tissue. The best we could do, in his opinion, would be to disappear from the face of the earth. He hates us as much as is becoming to his sense of intellectual elegance. We only think that liberals are in error; they think that we are a bane, against which the best defense is to pretend that it does not exist. Which, of course, will keep the conflict alive forever.

We think that the fondest dream that has eluded this society since the '60s is a coherence that would prescribe our dreams anew. Not that it's imperative to have dreams on a social scale, but it helps. We can call them ideals, or values, or norms of comportment and coexistence within a civilization and a society; we may also be very prudent in applying these ideals to the realities of life. But any attempt to eradicate them from the hierarchy of human needs that cultivates morals and manners, and holds them inseparable from a civilized existence, will only protract the oldest conflict; we who have observed the liberal's dismal failure in defending humanity by social efforts will oppose the liberal's bigotry to the bitter end. What the liberal in America has forgotten is that freedom is, in fact, a lack of oppression, a guaranteed absence of peremptory demands unmotivated by law or social necessity. Freedom from moral bonds and duties, common rights or exigencies of reason, is not freedom at all, but imposition. Liberty is not an abstract circle: an excess of it can become a sort of bondage.

Finally, the oldest conflict boils down to a showdown between outlooks. A progressive is by nature an optimist: he believes that at some time man and society will be perfect, or at least better, and this justifies much effort and some occasional skullduggery. A conservative is one who thinks that life is full of traps and the world full of nonsense, so let's stick with methods which, after millennia of exertions, have proven to be the least faulty and somewhat reliable. Which, once again, pits optimism against pessimism. And here's where my problem begins. I consider myself an optimist who believes that some of the most despondent pessimists, like John Calvin, for one, had the best advice for mankind. And that nothing brought mankind more sorrow, misfortune, ordeal, pain and desolation than the sunny, optimistic predictions of the progressives, from Babeuf to Marx to Lenin to Senator McGovern and Ms. Bella Abzug. However, when accused of relativism, I have to reject such a charge with calm dignity, for I also deem myself a Manichaean. I do believe in a distinct division between the forces of good and evil. Relativism is too often a shelter for hypersubjectivity, prejudice, ignorance. Hitler did not consider himself a force of darkness, but we know he was. This is why my faith in the human mind's ability to choose lets me look ahead to even the oldest and most protracted conflict with confidence.

—Leopold Tyrmand

The FAMILY
America's Hope

Rockford College Institute
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Rockford College
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Mr. Leopold Tyrmand, Associate Director of the Rockford College Institute.
Dr. Joseph Christensen, Director of Seminaries and Institutes Worldwide of the Church of the Latter-day Saints.
Professor Harold O. J. Brown, Chairman of the Department of Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.
Dr. Herbert Ratner, editor of *Child and Family Quarterly.*
Dr. John A. Howard, Director of the Rockford College Institute.

About the Program

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For registration information: Rockford College Institute, Rockford, Illinois 61101 (815) 226-4015.

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Dispersing the Fog

Guenter Lewy: *America in Vietnam;* Oxford University Press; New York.

by Alan J. Levine

This is an inspiring book, even though it deals with a very gloomy subject. For Guenter Lewy has shown that it is possible to uncover essential truths about an event of recent history that has been obscured by more controversy, confusion and deliberate lies, than almost any other in the twentieth century. Using original documents only recently available, Lewy has done more to dispel the "fog of war" than any other writer.

In the first half of his book Lewy provides the reader with a sound, detailed account of the United States' role in Vietnam from the start of help to the French in 1950 until the collapse of 1975, concentrating on the period after the 1954 Geneva "agreements" and particularly on the massive American intervention after 1964. The latter half of the book is an analytical treatment of the most controversial aspects of the war; the legality of American military tactics, war crimes, and the bombing of North Vietnam.

Beyond explaining what happened, which he does superbly, Lewy reaches two principal conclusions. First, the failure of American policy was due primarily to failure within Vietnam; i.e., not to political constraints or the collapse of support for the war effort in the United States. Second, and more important, that "the sense of guilt created in the minds of many Americans is not warranted and that the charges of officially condoned immoral conduct are without substance." Lewy finds that the war was proportionately less destructive of civilian lives than World War II or Korea. There is no attempt to blink the real war crimes that were committed; they are reviewed at sickening length. However, Lewy shows convincingly that they were in no sense typical or simply the inevitable results of American tactics. Lewy's own view seems to be that the war was justified, though he argues that the American government continually overestimated the importance of both Vietnam and Southeast Asia as a whole in world politics. But he is content—or perhaps just sly enough—merely to remark that events since 1975 lend "strength to the view that the American attempt to prevent a communist domination of the area was not without moral justification."

Alan J. Levine, a historian, is a frequent contributor to these pages.

> "In essence, Lewy has written a cold-war tract in the guise of setting the record straight on Vietnam . . . Lewy's double standard of moral appraisal is everywhere evident, albeit in a sneaky, covert sort of way . . . This makes it a real weapon in the ideological campaign to restore American confidence in its imperial destiny in the third world."
>
> —*Nation*
>
> "As scholarship, Lewy's book is a shoddy piece of work; as a moral undertaking, it is simply shameful."
>
> —*Progressive*

What is left of the vast output of attacks on American policy in Vietnam, which became virtually a growth industry in the late 1960s and early 1970s? Very little. Lewy exposes most of the antiwar charges, and certainly all of the more extreme ones, as nonsense. An examination of the accusations made against the conduct of the air war against North Vietnam, in particular, tends to confirm Hitler's view that the bigger the lie, the more easily it is believed. Lewy shows that the charges of deception made against President Johnson were mostly unfounded, though the facts do show that while Johnson was honest, he was guilty of wishful thinking and postponing difficult decisions until the last possible minute during 1964-1965. The Tonkin Gulf incidents were not staged to provide an "excuse" for American intervention, and Johnson did not secretly decide to send American troops or bomb North Vietnam before 1965. When Johnson ordered the Marines to land in March 1965, this was part of a limited move to defend a key base, just as the President said, and not as a sneaky way of committing troops to a major ground campaign; that decision was reluctantly made later. Contrary to the claims of Theodore Draper and Roger Hilsman, the government did not predate the enemy's commitment of regular North Vietnamese troops to justify its action; it merely reported the facts as it knew them—in fact the size of the North Vietnamese force was underestimated. The claims of deception turn out to be as false as the tediously similar claims made about many previous American wars, including World War II. The ready acceptance of such charges by American liberals, against a liberal administration which strove heroically to carry out their domestic program, is astounding in retrospect.

The wilder charges made by the left fare even less well. Lewy, of course, easily disposes of the crazy argument that the United States was committing "genocide" in Vietnam. The claims that the South Vietnamese government held hundreds of thousands of political prisoners in terrible conditions—remember the "Tiger Cages"?—widely publicized

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by men like Father Drinan turn out to be without substance. So does the somewhat contradictory charge that the Phoenix program, actually an intelligence operation, existed to summarily dispose of the South Vietnamese government's opponents. As Lewy observes, many opponents of the war were ready to believe the wildest allegations against the Americans and South Vietnamese, but swallowed the worst sort of lies from the Vietnamese communists. Epigones of the antiwar movement like Ramsey Clark denied that the prisoners of war they met in North Vietnam were mistreated, only to be exposed as fools or liars in 1973. Maybe there is a "moral" argument against the war left somewhere, but a lot of people have made long sea voyages in open boats proving otherwise.

America in Vietnam also disposes of some of the wishful thinking common among "hawks" and conservatives. One example of this is the idea that things would have been all right if President Kennedy had not connived in Diem's overthrow in 1963. In fact, the situation worsened steadily before Diem's death, though it went downhill even faster after he left the scene. The notion that the Paris agreements of 1973 were satisfactory and that South Vietnam was sunk by Watergate and/or Congress is dealt with critically and realistically. In fact, as many people pointed out at the time, the agreements were a farce and a "face-saving" measure for the Nixon administration. Their only real value was to obtain the return of our prisoners of war. The very common idea that the war was simply an "outside job" and that defeat was due to our failure to smash North Vietnam is effectively refuted, though I feel that Lewy goes too far in the other direction. In fact the struggle in South Vietnam, though directed from the beginning from the North, was possible only because of genuine disaffection within the country. The Southern government was not the monstrous oppressor so often pictured, but it was never efficient or popular, and morale was always low. The war was in some degree a civil war and a lot of the American government's problems were due to its unwillingness to admit this frankly and forthrightly.

Lewy is strongly critical of General Westmoreland and of American strategy and tactics. Further, he suggests that Westmoreland was derelict in failing to see that his own Rules of Engagement were enforced, thus contributing both to inadvertent civilian casualties and to the Mylai massacre, and this criticism seems to be right. However, it is doubtful that Westmoreland's strategy—defeating the enemy's big units as far away from populated areas as possible—was quite as complete a failure as Lewy makes out, though many of Lewy's criticisms may be valid. Lewy's view is that Westmoreland let pacification take second place, while the communist regular forces were able to divert the Allied forces from this task, inflict fairly steady losses, and undermine American morale at home. The proper course, Lewy thinks, was a "population-control" rather than an "attrition strategy." There is no doubt that intelligence was badly organized, that pacification was given insufficient attention, that the South Vietnamese armed forces were not properly built up, and that the enemy regulars were able to replace their losses from the North. However, the Viet Cong do seem to have been losing their grip in some areas and they needed Northern replacements in their main force units by 1967. Westmoreland's claim that the enemy was forced into the Tet offensive by the feeling that he was losing may well be true. And, as Westmoreland has insisted, it was the enemy's big units that defeated South Vietnam, though his own policy of trying to destroy them as they appeared in the South may have been no solution at all.

It is in dealing with this problem that Lewy is not quite convincing. Lewy rejects the arguments of many military leaders that the constraints on action against North Vietnam and the "sanctuaries" in Laos and Cambodia prevented victory. "This argument is less than persuasive, for the war, in the final analysis, had to be won in South Vietnam." He points out that the defeat in 1975 was an "ignominious collapse," "due not only to ARVN's inferiority in heavy weapons and the shortage of ammunition but in considerable measure was also the result of lack of will and morale." There is truth in this, but was it reasonable to expect the South Vietnamese alone to sustain a struggle against a better-equipped force after a long, exhausting war which they had only been able to survive thanks to massive American help? Many of the restrictions on the American forces seem crazy, and the war developed in a way that no one in his right mind could have predicted. In 1965 many people supposed that the United States might lack the patience or ability to defeat the Viet Cong in South Vietnam. No one imagined that we would be unable or unwilling to stop an ordinary military conquest of South Vietnam by the North—yet that is what happened. We succeeded, if belatedly, in the "hard" task, and failed at the "easy" one. There can be few, if any, historical precedents for such folly. □

"This is not a good era for leaders. Chroniclers of the contemporary scene note that in all fields of endeavor there is a scarcity of individuals who are nationally acclaimed and respected. The implication seems to be that the American bloodline has run out of the stuff of greatness. What has actually happened is that there is no longer a consensus as to what is forward motion and what is backward, so that anyone who is successful in moving the group in any direction is subject to criticism from within the ranks of his own organization as well as from professional commentators. Acclaim from some quarters is balanced with censure from others."

—from *The Alternative Media: Dismantling Two Centuries of Progress*, soon to be published by the Rockford College Institute.

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Why Did They Die in Vietnam?

James Webb: *Fields of Fire;* Prentice-Hall; Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.

by Joseph Schwartz

Fields of Fire offers the reader a different perspective on the Vietnam war than most other fiction dealing with that war. The distinctive tension of this novel is generated by the contrast between what the narrative directs the reader to and the response one could normally assume of its audience. That is to say, Webb confronts our conscience which we have learned to put aside through rationalizations, excuses, and after-the-fact explanations. This tension would be much less effective if the novel did not have the credibility of an eyewitness and participant as part of its texture. Somehow we feel morally obligated to give heed to the person who can make the legitimate claim that he was there, even if we reserve the right to disagree with his conclusions. It is the vital presence of the author in this work that makes the novel at least for here and now a moving experience.

The major premise of the narrative statement is Lt. Hodges' reflection that "my war is not as simple" as the wars of America's past. What made it so complex? This was the kind of war in which people felt no obligation to serve on other than their own terms. Robert E. Lee Hodges, Jr., however, fights because his ancestors have always fought, knowing that a man cannot choose his country's enemy.

> "It was the fight that mattered, not the cause. It was the endurance that was important, the will to face certain loss, unknown dangers, unpredictable fates. And if one did it long enough and hard enough, he might happen upon a rewarding nugget. But, in any event, he was *serving,* offering himself on the altar of his culture."

The refusal to admit defeat may be unreasoning, but the emotion generated thereby passes through the blood from one generation to the next—"a fierce resolution that found itself always in a pitch against death." His warrior ghosts are with him everywhere. The unity he feels with such a primitive instinct makes even the losses of the past a source of strength to him.

> "[Webb's] plot and characterizations . . . remain at a rather stereotyped level . . . unsatisfying intellectually."
>
> —*Booklist*

This war is not so simple because weathered soldiers tell him what his own experience confirms, that the suffering is unique. Men are turned into animals in a wild bush war unlike any other, an experience for which no one could be prepared. Only the most dedicated or the very craziest could take it. A constant refrain, like a musical reverberation, runs through the book, "I'm in Hell." The compelling picturization of this suffering, the novel's strongest point, is especially moving because the meaning of the suffering cannot be explained. Has Hodges been warped by his birthright? Who appreciates his suffering? "Who do I suffer for?" It is not, he discovers, what is happening in Vietnam that matters any longer. It is what's happening back in the States that matters. The war touches no one but the soldier. "We have been abandoned." Those back home do not know how to fight the war nor how to stop fighting it. "They ain't worth dying for." Gilliland, the spokesman for another era, recalls his pride in being a Marine and his shocking discovery that because of his uniform he is now considered an animal: "she spit at me." Hodges comes to recognize that nobody back *there* cares "whether anyone of us live or die." If you cannot win a war with your hands tied behind your back, you quit, or you become crippled, or you die—mostly, in this novel, you die.

Lt. Hodges dies. The meaning of his sacrifice is beyond his understanding. "He doesn't know anything about it anymore." The author, however, does not back away from making a judgment. Hodges' brief romance with Mitsuko, an Okinawan girl, has produced a beautiful child, "a complementary mix of gold and white." It is to this son that an answer must be given. "Why did he die in Vietnam?" His mother says simply, "He was a warrior there." Her answer calls up for the reader Hodges' earlier spiritual communion with his warrior ghosts who taught him not to be afraid. But, insists his son, "Is it good to be so brave? To fight for your country like that? Was it a *good* thing that my father died?" His mother answers, simply again, but offering her son (and the reader) a key, "It was a *very* good thing your father did." Webb puts the answer in her mouth because she is from a different culture, one closer to the tombs of its ancestors, one which can better understand the most basic qualities of the human condition. Her affirmation carries the baggage of centuries and is meant to resonate with Hodges' colloquy with his ghosts.

Her answer is a good deal more satisfying than the one given by the lawyer father of one of Hodges' men. Unfortunately, I think he speaks for Webb as much as Mitsuko does. He makes the point that the strength of the whole comes from each individual's surrendering a portion of his individualism to the common good. So far, no argument. He adds, "And the common good is defined by who wins at the polls and the

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Dr. Joseph Schwartz, of Marquette University, edits the quarterly Renascence.

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policies they make. Like it or lump it." Mitsuko, knowing better, would smile at such naive pragmatism. Surely the common good is defined by something more than the counting of heads. The argument is a serious flaw caused, I believe, by angry impatience, which led to the special pleading that urged Webb to include this weak idea as evidence for his case.

James Webb makes a deadly sincere effort to tame the war in the way that artists must tame their material in order to put it to use, shaping the waste so that it takes on the splendor of form. Yet, his anger is barely contained by the conventional devices he uses. Perhaps he felt that he had no choice but to rely on a series of war-novel conventions, feeling that basic emotions generally get expressed in conventional forms and platitudes. It is, however, the way one orchestrates these platitudes that makes a work of art quick or dead or something in between. The conventions are there in abundance. There are the various types of soldiers, unsure of their identity and thus openly vulnerable to experience. Almost all have the expected nicknames to mask their insecurity. Nationalities, races, and types are all represented to show the universality of the experience. One is full of street smarts, another is fearful, another is a womanizer, another is brave, and so on. The past is irrelevant, the present immediate, and there is no future. A precious fraternity develops.

> "He missed the people in the bush, more than he had ever missed any group of people in his life. There was a purity in those relationships that could not be matched anywhere else."

There are the wives and girlfriends back home. There is Hodges' brief romance. There are the understanding officers, the obtuse, the cowards, the hostiles. The way Webb uses these conventions is only satisfactory. His anger is not sufficiently controlled. And when raw life breaks into the house of art, the result can be sentimentality, propaganda, or, as it is here, special pleading. Webb has not altogether succeeded in containing that threat to his structure.

And yet I was moved by his work. Why? For two reasons, I guess. First, Hodges thrust himself boldly forward into my forgetfulness, asserting his moral claim on my conscience. The image of his vulnerability and that of his comrades in this bush war is hard to forget. The war scenes are done so vividly and with such passionate intensity that they linger in the imagination. The dead and the maimed do not remain placidly on the fringes of my consciousness; they are there center stage, and their mute questions speak in a loud roar. His gifted reporting captures the scenes of battle with an unmistakable authenticity. I see the face of the Barbarian closer than I did before, and know better why there is no grin on his face as he gazes steadily at our nervous levity and our passion for trivializing the sacred.

Second, *Fields of Fire* as a topical work called to mind obliquely but firmly what William Safire has called the "now we knows" about the Vietnam war. The blood bath that wasn't supposed to happen did. Cambodia was in fact a vital staging area for VC attacks into South Vietnam. The "domino theory" so discredited is not discredited anymore. The world's perception of our weakness of will or loss of nerve has invited aggression. To Hodges' question comes a belated and inadequate answer. "Who do I suffer for?" For knowledge, ineffectual after the fact, but perhaps usable on the road we have yet to travel toward the turn we have not yet taken. □

Unintended Sadness and Unspeakable Confusion

Charles Simmons: *Wrinkles;* Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.

by Edward J. Walsh

A few years ago George Gilder wrote *The Naked Nomads,* a book that touchingly described the lives of men without wives or convictions, who stumble through youth into middle age preying on women, until age forces them into a twilight of loneliness and self-pity. Charles Simmons' *Wrinkles* is the fictional adjunct to Gilder's book. It is a series of brief chapters of a man's life, which move from childhood to adolescence to middle age in a matter of paragraphs in no discernible order.

The novel is apparently intended as allegory; Simmons' protagonist is identified only by the personal pronoun "he." As allegory, it purports to be a saga of honesty and freedom blended with mature wisdom and, incidentally, sophisticated literary taste, since "he" is a successful novelist. But for all Simmons' ostentatious effort to write something original, to be simple and unaffected in tone, his book easily passes the test of sophistication required of modern fiction by the reigning arbiters of American taste, who have called it "charming," "witty" and "poignant."

Wrinkles is a book full of unintended sadness and unspeakable confusion. The novel is a profile of a middle-aged man who has learned nothing more in life than how to get a woman into bed, and how to comb his thinning hair to hide his bald spots. His eventual failures at both are rationalized by sweeping, resigned observations about the world,

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on the level of: "Near the end of his life he will be able to do whatever he wants with his time, civilization and nature having lost interest in him." These we are expected to swallow as the wisdom of a man who has led a rich, full life. But Simmons' character leads a life utterly banal and unoriginal, and his trite soliloquies reinforce that conviction at the close of every chapter.

For Simmons' attempt to take a new stylistic tack does not disguise the fact that he has created a caricature, and that the theme and movement of his story are threadbare and worn. His is the story of contemporary man: sophisticated, narcissistic, sexually primitive; without faith or humility. In a word, a cipher, as a novelist, and a satyr.

Simmons writes to intrigue; the rush of chapters about boyhood is an impatient prelude to his solemn setting forth on marriage and art, on love and loneliness. The dreary anti-Catholicism at the outset, though, is a dead giveaway: Simmons means to present his credentials to the modishly agnostic editors at big-league publishing houses as sufficiently disdainful of Roman collars. The nuns of his childhood are superstitious fools, unless they leave the Order, in which case they are like "Sister Noelita . . . who taught the fifth grade; everyone thought this was great good luck. She left the Order the next year." But Mother Ecclesiastica, the oldest nun in the school, was "brown and wrinkled, and once whipped him and another boy with a cat-o'-nine-tails." The lay instructor, again, is "bright and pretty." The consistency of bigotry is almost surprising, beginning with: "His eight years at St. Ursula's Grammar School coincided with the depression" (small "d"), to the friend, Robert, who spurns a pretty girl to become a priest, then as if by the natural order of things, an alcoholic. It is there, not at all subtle.

Our protagonist outtalks a Jesuit on the existence of God, and marries a Catholic woman, who becomes a shrew/hussy/ultraprude. He leaves his family with scarcely a nod, free, then, to "have many affairs." And that, except for the extra pages, is the whole of it. The rest is a catalogue of quaint remarks about eluding old age and the appearance of being a fool.

It is too easy to be mesmerized by Simmons' approach to the idea of freedom. It is simple and direct, and could be capsulized thus: "I did what I wanted despite the hypocrites around me. They are fools if they don't act the way I do." He wants to come across not so much as the he-man personification of the *Playboy* sales pitch, but as a courageous individualist, blazing new trails and setting new standards for a benighted world. These are not standards of behavior but of rationalization. He speaks to his readers, disparaging regret; there is nothing he has done that he would not do again. This is the second surprise of the novel, that, after the surpassing miserable life Simmons describes, he assures us it was rich and worthy.

"Self-knowledge—not happiness—is the issue here, and the hero's pursuit of it is uplifting."

—*Newsweek*

This is Simmons' confusion. His values are reducible to the dilettante's well-turned phrase, and no more. Self-esteem and a "sophisticated" knowledge of the world sum up what is important to him; when old age puts them out of reach he will satisfy himself by inventing new wisecracks and idiosyncrasies.

But the novel is also full of unplumbed sadness. It is obvious that Simmons actually thinks this way; his character is really supposed to be admirable, wise, and chic. The author's carefully crafted tone of pathos and nostalgia is a front for envy; Simmons wishes his book were autobiographical, and seems to believe he has created a character and a way of life his readers would want to emulate. In his mind, it is worth it even to be thought of as a fool, since only common people think him one, people like barbers and women and employers. Because, according to Simmons, his man-in-charge-of-his-life really knows the truth about life. The truth is himself, and nothing and no one else matter.

This kind of preoccupation with self is not new in literature. What is probably most striking about it in *Wrinkles,* though, is that Simmons coats it with *romance,* grafting onto his character the requisite virtues of any swashbuckling man-of-the-world: intellect, virility, objectivity, and tolerance, a composite of Zorba the Greek, Jake Barnes, and Emerson—a veritable Renaissance man. He stands above mere mortals in his smug knowledge of himself, ordained by his own penetrating insight into life, to travel through the world unappreciated and unadmired by others. Simmons thus willingly dwells on his character's human flaws and faults, which are to be thought insignificant when measured against his eloquent, though irreverent vision of the world.

If Simmons had made his protagonist a sheet metal worker or a bank teller or a travel agent, his novel might have been fascinating, or at least absorbing. Of course it wouldn't be as titillating, for steel workers and tellers aren't ordinarily thought to get away with as much as novelists. But no, Simmons makes him a writer, as Herzog was, and Nick Adams, and Stephen Dedalus, and lately, T. S. Garp. Writing about writers is a genre itself, and great and mediocre novelists have availed themselves of it because it affords so much opportunity for aimlessness *qua* freedom in the storytelling. That something poignant and artistic will emerge from a book about a writer is an assumption often made quite without reason. With *Wrinkles,* it is a substantive sign that Simmons never intended to say anything original, but to pack up his clichés and climb aboard the bandwagon for a fast

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ride to critical success.

The acclaim has been his, the formula still works. It calls for explicit agnosticism, in varying doses, or at least a fastidious distaste for organized religion, especially Catholicism. Adventures with homosexuals are also necessary, and they must be genteel and educational experiences, since homosexuals are deemed tolerant and enlightened beings. Simmons cites a telling example: his protagonist's doctor, a homosexual, informs him that his mistress who let him sleep with his head on her stomach is therefore a friend as well. This remark, be it crude and slugheaded, is paraded by Simmons as a veritable thunderbolt, its presence on the page dwarfing, with measured understatement, everything else in the chapter. Things such as this stand out starkly in *Wrinkles;* they are difficult to miss.

The most predictable ingredient in Simmons' best-seller recipe is preoccupation, no, obsession with sex. Here, his kinship with Gilder's stereotype looms large, for the bombardment of sexual meanderings is almost clinically consistent with the fantasies of the burnt-out refugees from the war of the sexes that *The Naked Nomad* is devoted to. Again, the author salts it with his goatish philosophy: "If the lover's hidden desire is frustrated, he seeks greater satisfaction from sex; if this fails, love dies." Simmons' tone changes when he writes about copulation and sexual opportunism—it becomes harder, more introspective, as if to compensate, with his character, for a growing coldness toward the world.

But it may well be instead that Simmons abandons his pretensions of writing serious literature with the sex, and betrays an easily recognizable desire to sell copies, sell them to anyone. His sailors' language and insatiability are free of preliminaries. For him, sex is pornography, and no more. Through it there is not a hint of seriousness or commitment; his "falling in love" with somebody after his marriage dissolves is not in the least convincing or interesting. It is a front for writing about sex, as if Simmons worried that he wrote too many chapters without it.

Wrinkles falls into a familiar category, as Simmons hopes it would. His book, with all its speechmaking, is a confused, pernicious sham. His protagonist ends up knowing less about life in middle age than as a child. It is a run-of-the-mill novel about an author's self-indulgent fantasies, coated with a cheap sheen of nostalgia, which, of course, always sells. The tragedy of Simmons' *Wrinkles* is its gimmicky triteness, a tragedy for us, the readers, and for him. □

Wouk's American Epos

Herman Wouk: *The Winds of War;* Little, Brown & Co.; Boston. *War and Remembrance;* Little, Brown & Co.; Boston.

by Otto J. Scott

The Thirties were the golden days of radio. It was then that people turned toward their sets as to a dream machine. Radio retained that special quality even as the decade drew toward its close and the world toward war. Radio personalities loomed as giants in the mental life of the nation, and a writer who fed material to such a personality was considered successful. Herman Wouk was one such writer, and the personality for whom he wrote was Fred Allen, whose gravelly voice and acerbic wit convulsed millions.

Later Wouk was swept into the war effort and, after a year promoting bond sales, served during the Solomon and other campaigns in the Pacific aboard two consecutive destroyer-minesweepers. The first of these ships was decorated; on the second Wouk—a Lieutenant—was executive officer, and second in command. In all he was at sea three years, and during that time he worked, between duties and dangers, on his first novel.

That novel, now largely forgotten, was called *Aurora Dawn.* It was published in 1946 and was chosen by the Book-of-the-Month Club. As everyone knows, that meant instant commercial success, wide distribution and attention, and general respect from publisher's row. Many writers struggle for years for that particular sort of home run; it has been known to unhinge several who were briefly so lucky. But Wouk was no accidental success. His second novel, *City Boy,* was selected for condensation by the *Reader's Digest* and was made into a movie. Two such successes in a row are rare enough to indicate the appearance of an author with a remarkable rapport with large numbers of people.

Wouk's next effort was also unusual: he wrote a play. It was mounted on Broadway, itself a triumph, and was titled *The Traitor.* It dealt with a betrayer of atomic secrets and came under immediate liberal attack. The theme was timely: the first Hiss trial had been held, and the air was heavy with fears about spies and Soviet threats, but it was *avant* in the sense that nobody realized that such secrets were, in truth, being betrayed. It was clear that Wouk was closely attuned to the general audience and also clear that despite his success, he was not inclined to pay homage to the powerful liberals of the theater.

Wouk's third published novel, *The Caine Mutiny,* appeared in 1950. Its central character was a paranoid U.S. naval officer in command of a small ship.

Otto Scott's latest book is the Secret Six: John Brown and the Abolitionist Movement.

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It was fast, easy reading; the dialogue was realistic but not coarse, it contained humor and built toward an agonizing climax in the form of a court-martial for the mutineers. At the very end of the novel the author turned the tables, in a nearly O. Henry manner, by having a genuinely mature officer tell the youthful mutineers what they—and their like—had been unable to see: that the pressures of war break men in diverse ways—both psychic and physical.

It was neatly done. Wouk managed to lure both readers and critics down the garden path, for in 1951 it was a literary fashion—since expanded into obsession—to see in the fighting men of the United States incipient or actual fascists, cryptohomosexuals and/or buffoons. Sarcasm and disillusion come into vogue in postwar periods, but the intellectuals of the United States astonished the world by the eagerness with which they clutched such caricatures, and called them portraits. Mailer's homosexual major-general and Irwin Shaw's opportunists in uniform were accepted with strange raptures while James Jones' lowly but virile peacetime soldiers were dismissed.

Since most of *The Caine Mutiny* seemed to fit the denigrator's mold, Wouk was widely applauded. His novel, meanwhile, made publishing history. Condensed by the *Reader's Digest* and tapped by the Literary Book Club, it received a Pulitzer, was translated into a dozen languages and sold over three million copies. Hollywood produced its version, in which Bogart made a memorable Queeg, and Wouk wrote a spin-off called *The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial.* Henry Fonda, Lloyd Nolan and John Hodiak all appeared in the play, to rapt audiences. Over and beyond all this, Wouk had created a fictional character who entered the world's dictionary of memorable stereotypes; an achievement of high art that can be neither planned nor forgotten. That was a wreath fate seldom bestows.

Some might have retired after such triumphs, but Wouk has remained diligent. In 1955 he produced *Marjorie Morningstar,* which was held aloft by the Book-of-the-Month Club and the ever-admiring *Reader's Digest* condensators; in 1962 he wrote a very serious but unexpectedly popular work titled *This Is My God,* on Judaism. Again, a Book-of-the-Month Club choice. So was *Don't Stop the Carnival,* which appeared in 1965. Novels, such as *Marjorie Morningstar* and *Youngblood Hawke* not only achieved huge sales, but were also made into movies. Meanwhile, the incredibly successful author also wrote *Nature's Way,* a comedy for the stage, and a pocket book called the *Lokomoke Papers,* and collaborated on a movie script *(Hurricane)* with Richard Murphy Slattery.

These triumphs, however, began to have the effect of successive artillery salvoes. Astonishing and impressive at first, they began to deafen and finally to bore intellectuals. It was clear, as time passed, that Wouk could not be coaxed into becoming an issues-clown, like Mailer, nor a dejected semi-outcast like James Jones, nor would he fade away, diminuendo, like Irwin Shaw. His religiosity, his literature classes at Yeshiva University, his ability to make a routine of success; his stubborn insistence on chronology, plot and normal, recognizable characters and situations have made him, in the eyes of Tom Wolfe's radical chic, nearly invisible.

But the public buys Wouk's books by the millions. When *The Winds of War* appeared in 1971, copies vanished from bookstore stacks and the title stuck to the best-seller lists for many weeks. Last year the second book on the events leading toward and contained in World War II appeared. *War and Remembrance* is still, at this writing, selling in large numbers. The duo really comprise one immense work which carry the same fictional characters through real events for over 2,000 printed pages. Crafted with the author's customary and renowned skill, they are carefully plotted and contain fascinating descriptions and lucid assessments of the world, the war and its people. But for the first time the reader can discern the lineaments of the author, and the nature of his close ties with millions which his prodigious storytelling ability had formerly masked.

This is mainly possible because of the changes that have taken place in American fiction in the years since Wouk first began to write professionally. Fiction, in these years, has precipitately declined. One of the major, if not the main reason for this decline has been the rise of new taboos, as fierce and forbidding, as ominous in their sanctions, as any of their predecessors. Because these taboos are new, and rose while older taboos were falling, they are not as openly admitted, nor violated as often in secret, as the older ones against explicit descriptions of sex, or of impudence toward authority figures such as clergymen and soldiers, judges, presidents and the like. The new taboos—still so fearsome their very existence is denied—forbid the modern writer from describing the real world, and insist upon portrayals that are actually liberal fantasies; distortions of persons, classes and principles. Serious literature has, in consequence, been eroded almost beyond recognition by propagandists, by political fanatics, by perverts promoting their vices, by persons projecting hatred of the human race, by campaigns against traditional religion and traditional symbols, and by actual agents of anarchy, terror and totalitarianism.

Popular writing is menaced by these pressures, and is not what it was. The attitudes and judgments it projects in its selection of heroes and villains, and in its turn of plots and situations, reflect the new values. Sexual explicitness, still relatively new, diverts the attention of readers and masks a new cant by coating it with venery. Amid tides of obsessive politics, the popular writer is more severely constricted by powerful groups inside the publishing "industry" than ever before. Fiction being published by the major New York houses now

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comprises only ten percent of their new titles. A smaller number of fiction writers make larger amounts of money than ever before, however, so the situation bedazzles even as it contracts the numbers of those who furnish the national chambers of imagination. The freedoms of fictions have been dissected into categories: gothic, mystery, spy, historical, science-fiction and general.

This bureaucratic regimentation, stifling the freedom of creativity and impoverishing culture, has favored another notable new aspect of the modern novel in the United States: its increasing addiction to surface realism and special pleading. In that sense, fiction has drawn closer to nonfiction; has become a sort of pseudononfiction. Novels like *Hotel* and *Airport* by Hailey, attract attention by the verisimilitude of their backgrounds as much as by their cleverly choreographed turns of plot.

Both *The Winds of War* and *War and Remembrance* use the new emphasis to excellent advantage. The accuracy of their detail and their documentary approach to describing various settings and activities contain their own fascinations for a fact-drenched audience. Some reviewers, by noting that Wouk has played his fictional characters amid the scenes of a real war, have drawn attention to the earlier example of Tolstoy's *War and Peace.*

The surface resemblance, indeed, exists. But there is a vast gulf between the audiences to whom Tolstoy addressed his efforts, and the multitude today. Tolstoy wrote when the Czar was on his throne and Christendom ruled the world. The educated levels of his audience were still professing religionists, and virtually all the West was united—if not on matters of faith—at least on matters of morals.

Wouk's two novels have appeared at a time when our civilization is menaced by Dostoyevsky's devils, and when not one, but a series of holocausts have occurred. This is not ordinarily the stuff of which popular novels are made, but the Second World War occupies a peculiar, almost unprecedented time-warp.

Most huge and ruinous wars have been followed by a period of bitter cynicism, and World War II is not completely different in that respect. But unlike its predecessor, the Second World War has evoked no outcries against munitions-makers or profiteers; no accusations that it was unnecessary. It stands, in truth, as the shining moment in Britain's history that Churchill predicted, and in the United States only the truly perverse hold our effort in retroactive scorn.

"It is depressing to discover finally that a novel whose size, scope and method remind us of *War and Peace* and whose theme is bound to remind us of Mann's *Doctor Faustus* has for its real hero the United States Navy."
—*The New Republic*

The fact is, however, that a phenomenal amount of literature on World War II is in circulation. The Nazis seem to strut the screens of Hollywood and in television in greater numbers than when they were in power. They always lose, of course, and the heroism and skill with which they are outwitted might persuade the young that in their day Nazis were buffoons. Such retroactive victories hide a mountain of shame; of French retreat before reality and English humiliation on the battlefield; of American ineptitude and Soviet intransigence, and a host of dark and bristling issues as yet not fully defined or resolved.

Such issues have expanded since the end of World War II into the tangled situation we know today. But long before our times, the West took a downward path. Many argue that the First World War was launched for what was then considered good and sufficient reason—that is to say, for colonial dominance — and nonetheless flew completely out of hand. That governments then deliberately wasted the lives of millions can be considered evidence of the Western collapse of traditional faith, of morals in the deeper sense, and of sanity. Only lust for power remained. At its close, the fallen men of Versailles completed their butcher's work in a treaty that made a renewal of the war inevitable—whether Hitler rose to rule Germany or not. The road to war in the Thirties, however, could not be admitted by the responsible groups to have been a logical outcome of preceding errors. Therefore the Thirties remain an essentially unexamined decade, and the Satanic Hitler, the most useful peg ever discovered upon which to hang all responsibility. World War II, a continuation of this explanation, then dwindles to an adventure tale in which the white hats won—made more vivid than most such yarns by the horrors of Dachau and the villainies of the Gestapo. As a result, the period from 1935 to 1945 is etched in the minds of millions as though unique, separate and apart from the flow of history before or since—as fascinating, in a grisly way, as figures on a new urn, carved by new artists of a generation ago, repeated and radiated by later copies.

Herman Wouk, therefore, although a veteran of the conflict and a member of a group whose sufferings under Hitler were deliberately devised, entered upon these scenes as a novelist skilled in portraying what American audiences like to read. Half his audience, we must remember, recalls the period. The other half was not then alive. One half, therefore, does not want its settled convictions disturbed, the other half has already been educated to the official version, which contains neither origins nor afterthoughts.

Such speculations are not, of course, necessarily novelistic. A novelist chooses a period that is essentially a slice of life and of time. His choice can range from hours to years, and a war, which has a certain physical beginning

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and a physical cessation, is a large swatch to select. World War II, with its global, multi-ringed circuses of struggle and death, was so sprawling and kaleidoscopic that few writers have dared to depict more than one sector, one aspect, or one arena of its activity. Wouk has taken the entire spectacle and it is astonishing that he uses only a bare dozen of fictional characters to choreograph against every setting and important backdrop and event of the period.

Of these dozen characters the most important is Victor Henry, who enters the stage in Washington, D.C. as a U.S. naval captain. He is forty-five, short and a career officer, whose knowledge of the German language and analytic ability bring him to the attention of FDR. Wouk's FDR is exactly as one recalls from the newsreels: charming, jaunty, shrewd, democratic but also lord of the manor. Captain Henry and his pretty, country-club wife Rhoda are sent to Berlin, where he meets and she charms Hitler in the Chancellory. The settings are described with all the realism and sense of immediacy of a photograph, and the action moves as speedily as if we are in a movie theater. There are endless complications, clues are scattered shrewdly, and the reader is switched so swiftly from person to person, scene to scene, that the predictability of much of the plot is seldom apparent.

One of the Henrys' two sons is a naval jock and the other a more introspective sort; their daughter is slightly rebellious. She goes to New York City and falls in with a sleazy radio personality —a setting Wouk brings deftly and surely to life. The older son enters the naval air service; the younger visits Europe and falls in love with Natalie Jastrow, a "liberated" New York beauty who is tending her rich, famous uncle, Aaron Jastrow, author of *A Jew's Jesus.* Natalie, involved in an affair with a State Department bureaucrat who refuses to marry a woman of Jewish descent, decides to visit her lover in Poland—and she and young Henry are caught there during the German invasion.

Meanwhile Captain Henry gradually learns about Nazis, meets an English radio correspondent traveling with a pretty daughter, and the author speedily entwines the reader into a series of simultaneous personal and political developments. All the historic personages appear: Stalin, Churchill, various high officials in all camps including Goering at Karinhall as well as frightened refugees. *The Winds of War* describes the war by the Japanese against the British in Asia, the triumphs of the Nazis in France and in Eastern Europe, the strategy and the surprises of the early war with clocklike, nearly computerlike expertise. From time to time both fictional adventures and real developments pause while a mythical German General Armin von Roon is quoted at length from an equally mythical tome titled *World Empire Lost,* in which German rationalizations and boasts are refuted by a later, retired, translator, Victor Henry. The readers are, thereby, assured that the hero will survive, and are also provided an overview of the various military developments, lest they lose their way amid the tangled stories.

That line extends for over 1,000 printed pages in *The Winds of War,* and the paperback version issued in 1978 carried the legend on its cover: "Over Three Million-Copy Best Seller." There seems no reason to doubt that claim; the first novel is eminently readable and puts Natalie Jastrow into the

In the forthcoming issue of *Chronicles of Culture:*

The Ugly Beautiful People

"For over six decades, Hollywood mirrored the character and dreams of the nation. It did it in an unrefined, even garish, way, and was called the cradle of a new, vibrant, popular and folksy art. Simple-mindedness and tinsel, which has always determined Hollywood's *modus operandi* and has always been associated with its image, did not prevent it from capturing some essential truths about America, which, in turn, have commanded attention, sympathy, sentiments and even respect from the world at large. During the '60s, Hollywood was put on another course, hailed as 'creative' and 'introspective' by liberal elites. Movies began to reflect the marginal rather than the essential, distortions and aberrations of reality rather than reality itself. Instead of dreams, we were offered nightmares which were declared self-questioning insights into the actuality of both the desires and character of the nation."

from "Editor's Comment"

"John Updike is a practitioner of what must be the dominant literary form today—the unfunny comic novel."

from "Void Camouflaged by Vocabulary" by Whit Stillman

also:
Opinions & Views—Commendables—In Focus
Waste of Money—The American Scene—Screen
Music—Liberal Culture—Journalism
Polemics & Exchanges

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arms of young Byron Henry, then sends him away while she is menaced by the Nazis in Italy and her uncle Aaron blandly refuses to worry over such civilized people. Meanwhile Pamela Tudsbury, the uninhibited English daughter of the famous correspondent, falls in love with hero Victor Henry, whose wife mistreats him. The reader is introduced to Berel Jastrow, a Polish Jew who is able to become a Soviet soldier after the collapse of Poland and the disruption of his native village.

That series of major involvements, with some lesser figures that can be relied upon to remain around for a time, manages to hold attention even while enormous, cataclysmic events are described with admirable clarity and speed. There is no question that Herman Wouk knows his trade well. He has mastered all the techniques by which to retain attention, to keep action moving, to create suitable dialogue for various characters, and to portray believable, even familiar men and women. Their very familiarity, in fact, lulls suspicion and increases the reader's credulity, so that one accepts the uncanny appearance of one or another of these actors amid every great happening of the period. That is, of course, the great fascination of fiction, which releases the controls of the mind and allows the flight of imagination to take over—and that is also why fiction is so apt a vehicle for propaganda.

The second novel carries the Henrys into the war along with the United States, and places the Jastrows before the Nazi juggernaut. It contains descriptions of war at sea, war in Russia, events both great and small that carry heavy emotional charges. *War and Remembrance* has a number of war scenes that ring as true as any ever written. Byron Henry's commanding officer, for example, is wounded atop the submarine he commands, and orders it to submerge without him, lest it be destroyed by the Japanese enemy force. Natalie Jastrow Henry and her baby are, after excruciating ordeals, enslaved inside Germany by the Nazis; eventually she and her uncle are swept off toward the gas chambers. It would be unfair to the author to tell their fates in this review; readers are encouraged to learn it for themselves.

Other changes overtake the original cast of characters: the English correspondent dies and his daughter moves closer to hero Victor Henry, who rises in the navy to rear admiral. He is so puritanical, however, that Wouk has to maneuver Rhoda Henry into infidelity before her husband can be divorced. Even then the author is careful not to reduce Mrs. Henry; she remarries and finds happiness and wealth. The other characters who lure reader loyalty are fittingly rewarded. The second novel continues the rationalizations of General von Roon, and adds *A Jew's Journal* by Aaron Jastrow. These balance one another with remarkable symmetry; both contain interesting flashes, insights and glaring exaggerations, but both are extremely functional devices that fit the semi-documentary style so fashionable today.

Both novels deserve the great sale and attention they have received though neither for the reason that their dust jackets cite. They are not accurate histories, nor do they reflect the real war that took place. They are, in the political and strategic sense, firmly inside the great body of generally accepted opinion. The most glaring deficiency in that respect is in the portrayal of the Soviets, who are given credits à la Harrison Salisbury, their great apologist. The role of the Vatican is not denigrated so much as diminished; the French do not receive due credit for their suffering and the European Underground does not often receive the spotlight. The figure of Berel Jastrow, a Jewish fighter and underground agent is somewhat exaggerated, but then so are the abilities and ubiquity of virtually all the central fictional characters. There are some excellent, truly first-rate, scenes of naval war, and some events—such as the Battle of the Coral Sea—receive credit for their significance that not many novelists have matched in terms of strategic understanding.

The second novel has made a heavier impact than the first. That is natural enough; American audiences are more apt to be caught by scenes of a war in which this nation figures than by events of the Thirties which largely involved other peoples. Both novels are capable of being turned over to the scriptwriters as is; both are clearly material for cinematography; Wouk himself could turn either of them, or even parts of them, into new vehicles as he did a generation ago with *The Caine Mutiny.* That is not to deprecate, but to stress the author's immense technique; his craftsmanship. There is another quality to Wouk's work, moreover, that is outstanding: in a period crowded with writers who smear their fellow countrymen, and especially the military, he holds to the old attitudes. Wouk does not look back upon the American Navy in World War II as a haven for fascists or buffoons: he recalls men who fought and died for their country, and leaders who made mistakes, but who also rose brilliantly against high challenge. Throughout both *The Winds of War* and *War and Remembrance,* Wouk makes it clear that ancient standards of villainy and heroism hold in this century as well. He does not sneer at the weak, and even allows one State Department sophist to mature into manhood. In similar fashion his women are fallible but charming, capable of love and decency; his Nazis are as repellent as, indeed, they were in life.

To say, after all this, that this is not enough seems ungrateful and surly. Yet it must be admitted that all the skills of broadcasting and Hollywood, and of smoothly turned plot and technique did not serve this nation well enough in the Thirties, did not make the issues of World War II clear in the early Forties, and have not helped us much in the world since. We have need, of course,

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of decent men in the arts, and Herman Wouk is among the more honorable and admirable of our native writers.

But the world has well rewarded Mr. Wouk for his efforts, and although these are decent and readable and even virtuous, they do not stir the depths that are needed in art, to aerate our souls and to lift our hearts. In the years since 1945 we have all learned some new lessons and acquired new needs. We have learned that German torturers are not unique; we have learned that the Soviets massacred whole peoples deliberately, and in Cambodia we have watched a leadership decimate its own race. We have discovered that the Chinese are capable of sending millions to their graves and that Vietnamese Marxists are also imperialists; we see Africa in flames and tremble on the brink of new holocausts today. In short, we have learned so much about the nature of totalitarian societies and ideologies, and about their conflict with humanness, that the World War II experience seems to us now a rather simple exercise in ruthless brutality and murderousness.

In such times we can enjoy good artists, as always, but our craving is for greatness—and greatness is in very short supply. The comparison may, perhaps, be made clearer if Tolstoy is recalled. His *War and Peace* was replete with acute observations, stirring descriptions, believable characters and dramatic war. But over and beyond all that was the brooding and eternal sense of God, whose judgment determined the outcome of the struggle, though the means He employed were so subtle—a delayed message, a change in the weather—that neither the men who obeyed His summons, nor those who were defeated, were ever really aware or sure of even their own roles.

It was that great recognition that lifted Tolstoy's work and has kept it so influential through the years. And it is the lack of that assurance, despite all the other elements—the believable characters, the dramatic incidents, the actual episodic backdrop—that make Wouk's novels excellent, but not great. □

The Berlin Wall: To Be Taken for Granted

Curtis Cate: *The Ides of August: The Berlin Wall Crisis;* M. Evans & Co.; New York.

by Lev Navrozov

One of our favorite pastimes in Moscow was discussing how quickly human beings everywhere take for granted *any* new reality as something inevitable, natural, usual. For example, we were sure that once the Soviet regime had been established in the United States, in no time at all Americans would just be puzzled that someone could see in it something unusual, avoidable or even interesting.

Imagine someone in 1939 saying: "The present generation will see a Soviet wall—yes, of the kind of the China Wall—passing through Berlin—yes, Berlin, the capital of Germany, which will be an island amidst a Soviet colony." A wild fantasy, of course, yet how fascinating, from the realm of fictional literature.

Today many Americans would be puzzled that there is an author, Curtis Cate, who is interested in the Berlin Wall. Why on earth? Isn't it something natural, ordinary, humdrum? It exists. So how can or could it be otherwise? What's interesting about it?

A great deal, as the reader can find in Cate's book. The author undertook a labor which recalls both Hercules and Don Quixote: to interest the public in something it perceives as a natural part of monotonous, dull reality.

For inhabitants of the Soviet colony West Berlin was, as Cate shows, what Russians call a "breathing vent." Preparations to stop the vent had long been afoot, but, of course, the Western intelligence services were the last to notice them. Yet the population of the Soviet colony knew or guessed or suspected. The exodus to freedom surged past the three thousand per day mark. Effectively combining scholarly precision with psychological skill, Cate gives both an impressive documentary panorama of the event and close-ups of individual human destinies involved. One of the aspects of this panoramic-mosaic view is an important insight into the psychology of freedom. To me this insight was a revelation. Let me explain why.

Germany is a Western country. Kant lived in Koenigsberg, not in White Plains. Americans can stereotype the 100-odd nations of Russia as bearded, wild 16th century "Russians." But they can hardly stereotype Germans as patriarchal Orientals, unable to understand the modern Western wisdom of the *New York Times'* editorials. There was a danger that the capital of this Western nation would be divided by a wall, and so the inhabitants on the eastern side of the wall would remain in a Soviet colony forever. The result? More than 3,000 a day escaped from a Soviet colony to freedom. Yes, but how insignificant all these figures are in relation to those who could have fled, yet stayed.

"The small flat they [a German fam-

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ily] occupied in the Karshorst residential area [the 'East Zone'] was anything but palatial, but the rent was cheap."

How can one flee to freedom if the rent is cheaper in a Soviet colony? True, in the Soviet colony an apartment rent is no rent. No one can *rent* a dwelling. A dwelling is "issued" to one, as in medieval serfdom, one sticks to it all one's life, and pays a "rent." But what really matters is that this medieval-serf "rent" is *lower* than the rent in West Berlin. Georg (the husband) tried to make his wife see the light. Did he read to her that famous German poem proclaiming that "only he is worthy of freedom who can fight for it every day"?

"Georg finally managed to convince her that a higher salary [of a degree-holding engineer in West Berlin] would enable him to pay the higher rents encountered in the West."

Still, his wife was wavering. The argument and discussion went on for "weeks, indeed, months." Finally, his wife made up her mind. Surely she had not read "On Liberty." But Milkena (a baby food) was on sale in West Berlin, and not in the Soviet colony.

Cate describes the observations of Patrick Habans of *Paris-Match* when Berlin had already been divided by barbed wire, but some East Berliners managed to make a gap in the fence and escape.

"But what amazed Habans was the number who stayed behind, simply standing around to watch the fun. Holding the wire open for them to slip through, the young man kept pleading with his fellow East Berliners to avail themselves of this chance of escaping. But only a handful—perhaps not more than fifty or sixty—took advantage of this opportunity, whereas the crowd behind, so it seemed to Habans, now numbered in the thousands."

It is a sterling merit of the book that while obviously inspired by the concept of freedom, Cate does not idealize humanity (the Germans, in the present case), though he is not bitter about it either. He describes these human beings as they really were, with detachment and sympathy. And it is apparent from his description, if Germany is a fair sample, that in all countries, East *and* West, very few are strongly motivated by freedom as such. If we still have freedom in the United States, its edifice rests on a very few shoulders while most are sheer consumers, consuming while consumption is good.

Like all Soviet strategic actions, whether the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 or the coup in Afghanistan in 1978, the creation of the Berlin Wall was a highly efficient operation, swift, resolute, impeccably planned and executed. Cate shows this convincingly. Americans who laugh at Soviet inefficiency in the production of electric shavers or the growth of vegetables, should remember that only those who laugh last laugh well, and the invader gets all, including the shavers and vegetables.

As usual, the response of the relevant Western bureaucracies was self-defeating, lackadaisical, indifferent. In things strategic, these bureaucracies perform very much like the Soviet bureaucracies manage the production of consumer goods, except that to their inefficiency, Western bureaucrats add ignorance, ineptitude and the indolence of the 18th century French Court.

"For reasons that are still obscure, the first message about the crisis in Berlin, which the White House duty officer had promised to transmit to Hyannis Port at eight o'clock in the morning, failed to get through to John Kennedy. Or if it was delivered, the message was so vague that it seemed unimportant. Shortly after 10:00 a.m. the president and Mrs. Kennedy left their gabled cottage and drove to the St. Francois Xavier Church in Hyannis Port for Sunday morning mass. According to Kenneth O'Donnell's presidential appointments book, they left the church thirty-five minutes later and were back at the cottage by a quarter to eleven.

"Shortly afterward, John Kennedy, accompanied by Jackie, Caroline, and other members of the family, set out on the 'Marlin' for a midday cruise. The weather could hardly have been better. There were few clouds in the sky, and there was a refreshing ten-knot breeze blowing from the north. This time their destination was Great Island, where they were to have lunch at the Mellon Beach House with John Walker, director of Washington's National Gallery of Art, and his wife."

Besides, there was some logic in doing nothing about the Berlin Wall. After all, in 1945 Franklin Delano Roosevelt gave Eastern Europe to the Soviet regime. Formerly, logic had been that the Soviet rulers were entitled to conquer and assimilate territories within the former Russian Empire: the British Empire could not do it, of course, but the Russian Empire, allegedly reincarnated in its destroyers, was entitled to keep every inch of its territory. But in '45 Roosevelt gave away territories which had never been part of the Russian Empire. (A frequent explanation is that poor Roosevelt was so sick he did not know what he was doing, and my objection is that if he was *so* sick, why didn't he retire? Was his stay in office for another month more important to him than half of Europe?) The rest is certainly a corollary. If Koenigsberg or Prague could be given to the Soviet regime, why not half of Berlin? Or half of New York, for that matter? The other half could probably go to the rulers of mainland China.

Those who accept the Berlin Wall as a humdrum reality will accept *anything* in the same spirit. This is what Cate reminds us with his excellently researched study. □

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The Noble Destitute

George Gilder: *Visible Man;* Basic Books; New York.

by Kenneth Kolson

When my generation was in college—back in the days before America was "greened"—one of the "in" writers was Oscar Lewis, author of, most notably, *The Children of Sanchez* (New York: Random House, 1961), as well as a number of celebrated articles about poverty that appeared in *Harper's* during the early- and mid-1960s. As creatures of the affluent post-World War II society we had had no direct experience of poverty or the traumas associated with massive unemployment or double-digit inflation. But we had, some of us, heard at our parents' knees—to the point of becoming practically inured to them—the Great Depression Parables: those stories of soup lines and Apple-Annies; of idle men too proud to "go on relief" (as it was quaintly called); of Walton-sized clans huddled around the Philco straining through the static to hear FDR's reports from the front lines in that campaign that Madison Avenue—if it had had a chance (a reminder of just how recently advertising and national politics have been joined in unholy matrimony)—would have dubbed the War on Fear; of the Dust Bowl and "Buddy, Can You Spare a Dime?"; of dead-end kids with hearts of gold. One can only guess how many jaded sons and daughters of Levittown yearned for these heroic days of yore; for my generation Woody Guthrie was the middle-class white boy's Kunta Kinte.

Poverty could be ennobling: that was the lesson we were supposed to draw from the Depression. This is why Oscar Lewis' work, for those of us with social consciences, was so unsettling. Lewis wrote about what he called the "culture of poverty." Impoverishment, contrary to what our parents had told us, was not just a matter of economics; Lewis understood it to be also a state of mind. Lewis' description of that state made an indelible impression on me, as did Edward C. Banfield's *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1958), which showed how cultural norms can prevent an otherwise resourceful people from taking the steps necessary to lift their common curse of poverty.

The idea that there was something perverse about the poor made a great deal of sense to my generation—again, perhaps, because we had no direct experience of poverty ourselves. Just how much *political* sense such an idea made during the early 1960s was to be revealed by the publication of Michael Harrington's *The Other America* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), which was described by its publisher as "the book that sparked the War on Poverty." Here the culture-of-poverty theme was developed to its logical conclusion, the bottom line being that we "liberals" had to abandon the woolly-headed notion that poverty might be cured simply by "throwing money at the problem," even, if necessary, to the point of making the poor—technically—rich. For as Harrington pointed out, being rich is:

> ". . . not a simple fact, like a large bank account, but a way of looking at reality, a series of attitudes, a special type of life. If this is true of the rich, it is ten times truer of the poor. Everything about them, from the condition of their teeth to the way in which they love, is suffused and permeated by the fact of their poverty."

This regrettably, means that the problem with the poor is not a simple case of deprivation, relative or otherwise. The problem of poverty has more to do with the psychological deformation of the poor; an unlimited line of credit at Bloomingdale's evidently will do the poor no good. As a team of Cornell mental health researchers concluded during the '50s, the poor are "rigid, suspicious and have a fatalistic outlook on life. They do not plan ahead, a characteristic associated with their fatalism. They are prone to depression, have feelings of futility, lack of belongingness, friendliness, and a lack of trust in others." Elaborating on the perpetual Saturday night in which many of the poor seem to live, Harrington observed that "they do not postpone satisfaction, . . . they do not save. When pleasure is available, they tend to take it immediately." This in turn is related to the fact that the poor tend to be, as Harrington discreetly put it, "less inhibited," and "sometimes violent." "The poor," Harrington concluded, "are not like everyone else. They are a different kind of people. They think and feel differently . . ." In short, the philosophy adhered to by middle-class "liberals" like myself (basically, the philosophy of the bourgeois monarch Louis Philippe: *"Enrichissez-vous!")* simply had to be jettisoned if the poor were to be no longer with us.

What, then, was to be done? Since Harrington, like Lewis (and Banfield) before him, insisted that poverty be conceived as a state of mind, he proposed to develop some new definitions of the concept:

> "Poverty should be defined psychologically in terms of those whose place in the society is such that they are internal exiles who, almost inevitably, develop attitudes of defeat and pessimism and who are therefore excluded from taking advantage of new opportunities."

The similarity between this language and that of Chief Justice Warren in his 1954 opinion in *Brown v. Board of Education* ought to be noted in passing. For Warren, the famous school-segre-

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gation case turned not so much on the question of whether blacks had been denied the equal protection of the *laws* as on the "fact"—presumed to be empirically demonstrable—that segregation resulted in irreparable psychological damage for black children (a holding that created untold mischief for Allen Bakke's attorneys: Bakke, after all, had never claimed that his right to equal educational opportunity depended upon the condition of his mental health). In any event, the implications of this new philosophy were becoming apparent. Even those of us who were slow learners were able eventually to purge our minds of the romantic notion of slums inhabited by a noble poor. Now it was clear to us that if the poor were to be salvaged, their psyches would have to be rehabilitated; they would have to learn to defer gratification and to assume responsibility; they would have to practice the power of positive thinking.

Having acquired this new set of attitudes, and along with it the strident, proselytizing style of the convert, I naturally applauded wildly when the aforementioned Banfield published *The Unheavenly City* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co.) in 1968. For the thesis of that book (so I thought) was that poverty is only one aspect of a vicious syndrome, of a web of vice and corruption that operated to keep the poor more or less permanently in their lamentable condition. Banfield, it seemed to me, was simply repeating the liberal gospel when he observed that the lower-class (defined as people who are "present-oriented"—a sensible definition if poverty is a state of mind) individual "lives from moment to moment"; that he "has a feeble, attenuated sense of self"; that his "life-style" is marked by " 'action,' risk-taking, conquest, fighting, and 'smartness' "; that lower-class life is "extraordinarily violent," which Banfield took to be primarily "an expression of mental illness," the incidence of that malady being "greater in the lower class than in any of the others."

But this only goes to show how extraordinarily uneducated I was. Incredibly, I had slipped into the habit of reading books before reading the reviews, a blunder that I have scrupulously avoided ever since. The trenchant analyses of *The Unheavenly City* which appeared in the more chic journals of opinion had demonstrated convincingly that Banfield was undoubtedly a virulent racist and that he was almost as certainly a fascist; he had, after all, voted for Nixon, it was reported. As a result of these timely *exposés,* Banfield was prevented by the vanguard of the left from speaking at a number of universities, including the University of Chicago, a well-known citadel of academic freedom (and his former employer).

It was not long before sensitive commentators on the left began to vie for the honor of refuting the jackboot social science of Professor Banfield-Nixon. Two of these efforts stand out: Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward's *Regulating the Poor* and William Ryan's *Blaming the Victim* (both published in 1961 by Vintage, New York).

"Whatever its sociological significance, it is not terribly interesting."
—*New York Times*

Of the two the Piven and Cloward volume was by far the most conventional. Like Lewis and Harrington (and Banfield) before them, Piven and Cloward take it for granted that poverty is not simply a matter of an economic shortfall; once again, poverty is conceived to be essentially psychological. But transcending the analyses of their predecessors, Piven and Cloward, in this widely acclaimed study (Alvin Schorr, reviewing the book for *Saturday Review,* made an unforgettable juxtaposition when he averred: "This book is important and, like the Bible and Marcuse, . . . is likely to be referred to by many . . .") identify the root cause of that mental disease which afflicts the poor: the free market economy. The problem, it seems, stems from the fact that "change and fluctuation and unemployment are chronic features of capitalism." This means that capitalism generates certain "travails," "traumatic dislocations," and "catastrophic changes," all of which combine to produce an emotionally crippled class of alienated victims—the economic equivalents of the "boat people" of Vietnam. In theory, "these dislocated people become part of a labor supply to be drawn upon by a changing and expanding labor market." But in fact the economic history of the West, as Piven and Cloward read it, reveals that "people do not adapt so readily to the new and alien patterns of social life dictated by that work." This revelation has two main implications. First, the condition of poor people in the United States is getting worse, not better: "This book . . . so clearly belies the popular supposition that government social policies, including relief policies, are becoming progressively more responsible, humane, and generous." Second, the condition of the poor will remain desperate so long as they do not revolt, for "a placid poor get nothing, but a turbulent poor sometimes get something."

For those of us who had been weaned on the culture-of-poverty literature, Piven and Cloward's Marxism was standard fare, but Ryan's book, while leftist to the core, was so radical that it was startling and brought the whole question of poverty and its causes full circle. For Ryan, returning to first principles, rejected the idea that poverty is a state of mind. For him the culture-of-poverty literature was, in the worst sense, patronizing, and condescending in the extreme. According to Ryan the culture-of-poverty writers had concentrated on proving that:

> ". . . the poor, the black, the ill, the jobless, the slum tenants, are different and strange. They must learn to conduct or interpret the research that

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> shows how 'these people' think in different forms, act in different patterns, cling to different values, seek different goals, and learn different truths. Which is to say that they are strangers, barbarians, savages."

Because of his audacity Ryan was able to transcend the cant of both left and right and to announce boldly the hypocrisy of the culture-of-poverty writers who "dismiss with self-righteous contempt any claims that the poor man in America is plainly unworthy or shiftless or enamored of idleness. No, they say, he is 'caught in the cycle of poverty.' He is trained to be poor by his culture and his family life, endowed by his environment . . . with those unfortunately unpleasant characteristics that make him ineligible for a passport into the affluent society." Ryan, because his credentials as a leftist were in order, was able to speak plainly, and what he said, amazingly, was an encapsulation of the sentiments of every classical economist:

> "The simplest . . . proposition in understanding poverty is that it is caused by lack of money. The overwhelming majority of the poor are poor because they have, first: insufficient income . . . The facts are clear, and the solution seems rather obvious—raise their income and let their 'culture,' whatever it might be, take care of itself."

This confusion on the left has not yet been resolved; unfortunately, it is matched by schizophrenia on the right.

The latest contribution to the right-wing culture-of-poverty literature (in the tradition of Banfield, I dare say) is George Gilder's *Visible Man.* The title is meant to convey the idea that public policy since the mid-1960s has focused excessively on appeasing the unemployed young black male who is allegedly responsible for the looting and rioting and, more generally, the barbarism, that seems to be endemic to the archipelago of "Indian reservations" that is Urban America. The protagonist of Gilder's book, a young black welfare father—an "unrelated individual," in the lexicon of the Census Bureau—named Mitchell "Sam" Brewer, is as spiritually twisted and lives in a world as sordid and brutal — as subhuman, really — as anything imaginable. Sam is the classic culture-of-poverty victim; he is portrayed — it is characteristic of the genre—as having gobs of potential; as being bright and talented, articulate in his own way, competent enough to get by in the workaday bourgeois world—if he really cared to. But he *doesn't* care to; he doesn't *need* to. Why? Enter the villain of the piece (drum rolls, please): because of the welfare state. How does HEW work its mischief? By encouraging young black males to live off the ADC checks sent to welfare mothers. Of course certain services must be performed in return; according to Gilder, competition for the attentions of these welfare mothers—especially *white* welfare mothers—is intense. In any event, the upshot of this strangely sexist story is that this is bad because it "castrates" young bucks like Mitchell "Sam" Brewer.

I doubt it. But more to the point, I wonder if it serves any useful purpose to document—once again, and for the umpteenth time—the depravity and viciousness of the "culture of poverty." It might make sense to flesh out the bill of particulars if Gilder were bent on making the same recommendation as Banfield: that the lower-class poor be institutionalized, or, better yet, sterilized. Short of that, what is the point? The fact is that it contributes to a kind of mindless romanticism that permeates the poverty literature. (One would think that Gilder would be more sensitive to this point: the "visible man" is visible, as Gilder knows, precisely because of this tendency on the part of the mass media to depict the Angry Young Man—e.g., Billy the Kid, Clyde Barrow, James Dean, Eldridge Cleaver—as folk-hero/victim.) However worthy the cause to which *Visible Man* is meant to contribute, it may be said, insofar as it manifests a style that may be called reverse-sensationalism (Midge Decter's calling card: she is Gilder's editor at Basic), to shed precious little light on the problem of poverty in America. As a sage once observed, "you seen one slum, you seen 'em all." □

Books in the Mail

The Right and Wrong of Compulsion by the State, and Other Essays by Auberon Herbert; Liberty Fund, Inc.; Indianapolis. Brings back works and thoughts on the principles of individual freedom by a British XIX century conservative.

You Can Trust the Communists (to be Communists) by Fred Schwarz; Christian Anti-Communism Crusade; Long Beach, California. An exposition of communist tactics for expansion and how to combat them.

The Faith of the Pilgrims: An American Heritage by Robert M. Bartlett; United Church Press; New York. A social history of the Pilgrims and an examination of their religious faith.

Arator by John Taylor, edited by M. E. Bradford; Liberty Fund, Inc.; Indianapolis. A comment on politics and agriculture by one of early Virginia's strictest republicans.

Business Speaks Up! by C. Wendel Muench; The Richard B. Cross Co.; Oxford, Indiana. A thorough examination of capitalism's possibilities for businessmen.

Israel at the Polls: The Knesset Elections of 1977; edited by Howard R. Penniman; American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research; Washington, D.C. A valuable study on this topical subject.

U.S. China Policy Today by David Nelson Rowe; University Professors for Academic Order; Washington, D.C. An insightful look at the background behind the U.S.-China problem.

Freedom and Independence: The Hillsdale Story by John Chamberlain; Hillsdale College Press; Hillsdale, Michigan. The story behind Hillsdale College and its determination to stay free from the entanglements involved in accepting federal funds.

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The Drooling Darling of the NYC Cognoscenti

Jerome Charyn: *Secret Isaac;* Arbor House; New York.

by Louis Ehrenkrantz

Richard Kostelanetz wrote that Jerome Charyn's fiction ". . . has established a solidly developing body of achievement." Saul Maloff has decreed that Charyn is "a greatly gifted writer." The *New York Times* promulgated that "Charyn's gifts are the important ones."

Stripped of all extraneous theorizing, one evaluates a novel by applying the following criteria: Has the writer said anything? Has he said it well? Has the novelist created a literary entity in which parts relate to each other in a consistent manner, and is the method of communication chosen suited to the reality he has constructed?

If the writer has been unable to "say anything," everything else becomes meaningless. All the arcane arguments about the relation of content to form cannot save a novel from oblivion if the novelist cannot create a reality that is able to survive, even on its own subjective terms. That is why *Secret Isaac* is a dismal failure. There is no observable connection between the bizarre events in the story. The characters urinate, fornicate and murder without motivations perceptible to the reader.

Isaac, First Deputy to the Police Commissioner, and a legendary hero of the New York City Police Force disguises himself as a hobo in a "nameless hotel just off whore's row." The reason is never made clear, since all the criminals and policemen know who he is. Only Annie Powell, the newest whore in Times Square, refuses to acknowledge Isaac's authority, importance, or even his existence. Quite unfortunate, because he falls in love with this lady of the night. Annie has a "D" carved into her cheek by "The King," Dermott Bride. Annie has joined the oldest profession to pay Mr. Bride the money with which he once bought her before taking her away to Ireland. Why does Isaac fall in love with the most unlikely of heroines? Why (since Isaac thinks nothing of beating up or drowning a suspect), does he let the key link in the mob go during an interrogation because the suspect has a coughing fit? If Isaac is the super detective, why does he learn of "The King" only when a sleazy porno merchant tells him about Bride? (Even Charyn wonders about that one: "Isaac Sidel shouldn't have been ignorant of the emperor of Times Square.") The reader never does find out why Isaac loves Annie or why Annie Powell wouldn't apply for a loan from HFC rather than taking to the streets.

James Joyce could create a self-contained world because his reality has an inner referent, the result of a compelling organization. Once one knows what Kafka is about, one can relate the seemingly disparate parts of *The Castle.* Once one knows what Charyn is all about, one turns quickly to a different author.

And what is Charyn about? A literary impostor, relying on conventions created by more serious writers, comes first to mind. Almost the entire book of *Secret Isaac* is derivative. When he stands on his own, Charyn relies solely on stereotyped images to get him through. Where he professes knowledge —after all, in order to "say something," one must "know something"—he reveals ignorance. And yet, the critical praise continues. The question is, how does he get away with it?

Perhaps he does it because he has a facility of appearing literary even while writing comic book prose. Isaac identifies himself as "Moses Herzog" in Dublin. Shades of Bellow? John Rathegar, policeman on the take from "The King," deposits the money in various banks under the names of Leopold Bloom and Gabriel Convoy. Shades of Joyce's modernism? How far is the letter "D" from Hester Prynne's "A"? Bellow, Joyce and Hawthorne are not influences to be easily scorned. To a critic reviewing the novel in the *New York Times,* it might appear dangerous to miss the coquettishness of the pastiche. The "literary" importance of the innocent travesty is heavily underscored in the text: "That 'D' on her could sting a man's eyes. That girl's no goddam hooker. She was being punished for something she did. Annie's sin." Seymour Epstein, in the Sunday *Times,* picked this up immediately. "The Hester Prynne of Times Square," he explains.

Since any character's lines could be spoken by any other character, they all speak with one voice. A professor's wife (he's a Joyce scholar—naturally) upon finding out from Isaac that Annie is a prostitute because of Dermott, who is one of her husband's ex-students, says, "I'll help you kill the bastard, I swear. We won't tell Marsh. Marsh's a chickenshit. I'll go to Dermott in my raincoat, get him to visit me in your room. We'll club him with a pair of lamps, hide him under the bed. How will we git rid of the body?" Such tendencies to violence occur to almost anyone and everyone in the book: "Isaac had a maddening drive in him to arrest every pimp at

". . . a unique amalgam of psychological insight and scatological farce."
—*Time*

"Absolutely fascinating, as was to be expected."
—*Library Journal*

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the hotel and bash them on the skull." Charyn's writing is here and there so bad that one is uncertain whether it is a deliberate satire, an intended sendup. "He tapped them once on the skull to give the lads something to dream about," or: "The waiters at the restaurant saw the bum get into that big car. They were wise men. They understood that strange things existed in this world," make the reader feel embarrassed, whichever their origin. The heroine, in an effort to shake herself loose from Isaac, her admirer, says, "If you say anything, one word about a French restaurant, I'll squat right here and piss on the sidewalk." What does Seymour Epstein, the *Times'* critic, say about such stylistic gems? "But so skillful a writer as Mr. Charyn must know what he is doing. These representations must be assumed to be deliberate," he concludes.

There is one more strain that consistently runs through the novel, and the way it is mishandled may be another key to Charyn's popularity. I refer to what the novelist and his readers perceive as the "Jewish" qualities in the book.

As American Jews move farther away from their heritage, they seem to grasp at anything that gratuitously refers to their "Jewishness," no matter how superficial their own connections to their past often are. If a comedian uses words like "shtick" or "lox," peals of laughter resound from all sides of the theatre. This is supposedly "good for the Jews." Things are not much different in the literary world. Whatever one thinks of Isaac Bashevis Singer's books, it is an error to view him as a typically Jewish writer merely because he writes in Yiddish. His demons and imps are part of his own mythology, less central to the Jewish tradition than reviewers would have us believe. To a public largely ignorant of the religious roots of the Judaic tradition in Western civilization, I. B. Singer is "good for the Jews." Irving Howe conceded in a *New Republic* review that Chaim Grade, who also writes in Yiddish and has been translated into English, "digs deeper" than Singer does. Robert Alter has singled out Hugh Nissenson for praise as one who is both within the Jewish tradition and a major literary talent. Edward Lewis Wallant is unquestionably a great Jewish-American writer, yet Wallant, Grade and Nissenson are too authentically close to a tradition that asks too many uncomfortable questions—in short they are *too* Jewish—for an audience that yearns only for accouterments of a tradition. Nostalgia is all the rage, but few want to return to or confront the real thing. Although Professor Charles Angoff proposed that Chaim Grade rather than Bellow deserved the Nobel Prize for literature, only a handful of readers are acquainted with Grade's masterpiece, *The Yeshiva,* but everyone has read *Herzog.*

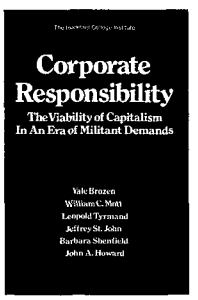
Charyn is conscious of the literary profit to be derived from being a Jewish writer. He pays lip service to Joyce and occasionally invites Farrell, but his model is Saul Bellow. Charyn's characters, like Bellow's, think in Yiddish. Of course, Bellow is careful enough to restrict Yiddish thinking only to Jewish characters. Charyn is sloppy in this regard. One of the prerequisites of this kind of pandering to an ethnic group is that the writer know his subject; Bellow, at least, never misuses a word or misunderstands a concept. Charyn is as ignorant of the tradition whose viewpoint he is supposedly writing from, as most of his audience is. Jews are reprimanded for waiting "years and years before they put a stone on a grave." The Jewish custom varies from waiting one month after death to one year before a memorial stone is erected. The name of the Jewish cemetery in *Secret Isaac* is called "Hands of Esau," an impossible name for any Jewish organization or institution, since Esau represents the historical enemy of Israel and is a synonym for an evil adversary. The equivalent name for a Catholic cemetery would be something like "Children of Satan."

Jerome Charyn has no authentic voice of his own. He attempts to imitate Bellow, but lacks Bellow's talent and education. He wishes to pass for a modernist without Joyce's understanding of innovation. In a sense, the critics reflect recognition of this lack in that each one compares Charyn to a different writer: Jack Ludwig thinks Charyn is a Nathaniel West or Isaac Babel. *Publisher's Weekly* thinks it has discovered a new Nabokov. The *New York Review of Books* detects a "Dickensian vigor," this last a peculiar aberration of mind since Dickens wrote one-dimensional characters but created recognizable people.

Yet Charyn is a man of integrity. On July 16, 1978, he started a book review of his own in the *New York Times* with these words:

> "Count me among the Philistines. I've never been able to finish *The Magic Mountain, Magister Ludi, The Plumed Serpent, Orlando* or *Lord Jim* . . . But the smell of 'literature' sickens me."

Jerome Charyn will soon be Andrew W. Mellon Visiting Professor of English at Rice University. *Caveat emptor.* □



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Commendables

Hoffer's Timelessness

Eric Hoffer: ***Before the Sabbath;*** Harper & Row; New York.

by David Pietrusza

It has been over a quarter of a century since San Francisco longshoreman Eric Hoffer surprised academia and learned society in general with his insightful *The True Believer,* the classic study of the psychology of mass movements. Since then he has turned out eight other volumes of iconoclastic wisdom. His ninth, *Before the Sabbath,* reveals that Hoffer, even in his seventies, can still mull over questions, paradoxes and historical trends that other philosophers and political scientists cavalierly overlook.

Before the Sabbath takes the form of a diary. In it he covers the usual wide range of topics—the nineteenth century, England's decline, the Asiatic soul of Russia, capitalism, communism, the role of intellectuals, the fate of Israel, the meaning of the work ethic. Yet, one very immediate and personal topic is on his agenda. He had always expected to die relatively young, around the age of forty. All his life he never planned beyond this, and he inscribed this six-month journal at age 72 in 1975, "It is almost eight years since I retired from the waterfront, but in my dreams I still load and unload ships. I sometimes wake up in the morning aching from a night's hard work. One might maintain that a pension is pay for the work we keep on doing in our dreams after we retire." He worries about slowing down: "Ballet dancers are the only creative people who accept retirement," he explains, "It occurs to me that if thinking is a ballet of ideas, the thinking mind should accept the fact that age makes dancing difficult."

Before the Sabbath is roughly contemporary with the writing of Hoffer's previous volume of essays, *In Our Time.* In one of those essays he dissected the motivations and actions of the newly emerging Islamic nations. In his diary the subject recurs: he expresses doubts about the Moslem world's ability to fully mesh modern ideas and technology with its millennium-old heritage, and forecasts that Islamic oil money would be used not to modernize in the Western sense but to continue the centuries stalled push of the Mohammedan creed. Musing on Kemal Ataturk's efforts to force Turkey into the twentieth century, he doubts the success of any such effort. "It is apparently easier to de-Christianize than to de-Islamize. Islam's rapid and total de-Christianization of the Middle East and North Africa contrasts with the ineffectuality of Christian proselytizing in Islamic lands. Islam caters to basic human needs and is without inner contradictions and tensions. It legitimizes an easygoing, even indolent life. I doubt whether any Islamic country can be durably modernized."

The erosion of the Occidental work ethic is one of Hoffer's prime concerns. The tendency of once-energetic races of workers and entrepreneurs to become "labor fakers" portends to him the eradication of the differences between the progressive West and the lethargic and archaic East—"the fateful event of our times is not the advancement of backward countries but the leveling down of advanced countries."

The spectre of an impotent and declining United Kingdom serves up to Hoffer in microcosm the problems of the Occident as a whole. There a once grand empire has settled peacefully into an atmosphere of economic ruin and the status of a third-rate power. "In Britain," writes Hoffer, "workers are immune to the blandishments of a higher living standard, and this attitude is spreading to other democracies, particularly among the young. I suspect that the present chatter about the quality of life is an attempt to mask the fact that to the new generation the good life is a life of little effort."

It is more than mere material largess that flows from human labor, he notes. The mundane work of earning one's bread, of keeping body and soul together, has served as a regulator and governor of human actions. "Our materialist civilization," he observes, "is edging toward tyranny because the elimination of scarcity also eliminates the hidden hand of circumstances that kept the wheels turning. The coming of abundance has weakened social automatism and discipline. Societies now need forceful authority in order to function reasonably well."

Hoffer does not look forward to the disciplined, authoritarian regimes that he feels are inexorably advancing on us, for he feels they are captained by arrogant, small-minded and small-hearted intellectuals—a new breed of prideful tyrants with a deep-down hatred for common humanity.

Before the Sabbath, in fact, presents a passionate challenge to this would-be ruling class. Such freshness of intellectual emotions at 72 makes Hoffer a never-aging value in America's contemporary letters. □

Mr. Pietrusza, an historian and free-lance critic, has recently written a book on Senator Joseph McCarthy.

In Focus

Heller's Gold

Joseph Heller: ***Good As Gold;*** Simon & Schuster; New York.

By his own admission (to reporters and interviewers), Mr. Heller conceived Bruce Gold, his protagonist, to make money. It's an honorable motivation for a writer, one that has prompted masterpieces in the past. It didn't work this time.

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Mr. Heller, whatever his achievements, is a sort of unfinished writer: much of his glory is well-earned, his lasting contribution to colloquial English, for example; there is detectable, enduring finesse in his prose; but there's also a lack of a larger moral or cognitive purpose in his work, which is an ingredient that can make writers of even less talented people. Good Soldier Svejk, the century's quintessential antiwar hero, found wisdom in existential contradictions. Yossarian, Heller's celebrated military antihero, found in them smartness, or, as the liberal claque contends, the art of survival. Of the three novels Mr. Heller has written, one voices his outrage against the war, the second—against the antihumanism of modern American life, and the last—against undeserved Jewishness. He conveniently prefers to forget that but for the Allied victory in 1945, to which *his* Yossarian refused to contribute, Joseph Heller might have ended up a cake of soap; that his career contains all the characteristics that he encourages Americans to loathe; and that Jewishness is seen by many as a source of pride which may, perhaps, justify rejection as an alternative passion, but makes petty snickering disgusting. Thus, *Good As Gold* becomes less than a novel and more of a literary potpourri replete with literary gossip (about both real and fictional characters) in lieu of literary substance. Cleverness cannot be the paramount ambition of a writer, yet reading Mr. Heller, one has a perpetual sense of his searching for cleverness rather than for the nature of things. The cutting edge of wit, even introspection, conjures neither sincerity nor depth, even if used in the best of faith; *Angsts* and foibles are too trifling a proposition to seriously fuel daily antagonisms between races and denominations. In *Something Happened,* his second and by far most impressive novel, Mr. Heller was out to demolish native social structures and wound up with old-fashioned sin as the source of evil—a conclusion he himself seemed to despise. In *Good As Gold,* he dissolves Jewishness into sleazy and repulsive poses; he intends to discredit *something* without convincing us that he knows exactly *what.* Ethnic self-hatred may be a subject of either tragedy or grotesquerie, but it becomes tiring as a stuffing for triple-entendres. So, Mr. Heller winds up with a semiotic novel in which assorted signs vainly try to become a unified message. □

Screen

So—What's New?

***The Warriors;* Directed by Walter Hill; Written by David Shaber and Walter Hill; Paramount Pictures.**

***Movie, Movie;* Produced and Directed by Stanley Donen; Written by Larry Gelbart and Sheldon Keller; Warner Brothers.**

A movie about youth gangs opened in the theatres from sea to shining sea and within a couple of weeks three young people were killed in rumbles which even *Time* admits were "inspired" by it. What's new in this? From the beginning of cinema, it was noticed that film had a metaphysical capacity to embellish everything — cruelty, ugliness and vice included. Violence, even when portrayed in the most naturalistic way and meant to repel, never in fact repelled, but rather attracted and mesmerized potential imitators with uncanny force. The impact was even greater when violence was made into glamour, stylization, an amoral ingredient of pseudorealism. Three quarters of a century of cinema as popular art and mass entertainment vaguely attest to a rather corny supposition that only violence condemned by the storyline, or used for even naively idealistic or melodramatic reasons, does not breed instant emulation. Violence uncondemned is simply promoted, and there's small wonder that *The Warriors,* a movie which makes physical abuse detached from any perceptible motivation as alluring as a mocha torte, or a sunbath, will gross millions—leaving behind a bloody trail. Every decade a movie or two comes up which ritualizes the sleaziness of the big city youth gang subculture, and some dead bodies are left in the parking lots and drive-ins as tribute to the romanticized violence.

The general and continuous decline of American movies to the level of a mere provider of impulses reaches an incredible depth in *Warriors.* The movie's departure point is a mythical (though immensely colorful, on the order of vegetative colorfulness) meeting of New York City gangs somewhere in the Bronx; the personality who has convened all of them is a grotesque cult figure by the name of Cyrus; his speech contains a bare vestige of mental activity—he informs the gathering that there are 60,000 organized gangs in the Big Apple, but only 20,000 policemen, which, to his mind, is enough of an argument for the "street people" to take over the city. Other reasons for such an action are not given, neither by him, nor by the director or the scriptwriter —which in itself is a classic example of liberal Hollywood's contempt for the human, even if criminal, brain. Cyrus gets killed by a bad gang (no explanation is given why; in contemporary liberal Hollywood killing has been reduced to the function of burping or scratching a pimple. A good gang—the Warriors—is wrongly accused of this killing and has to make its way home amidst the murderous vengeance of all other gangs in the city. This proves to be not too difficult, as it depends less on any mental effort than on switchblades, baseball bats, exploding gasoline, crowbars, etc., which are the ultimate achievements of

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the delinquent juvenile civilization and aesthetics. The alleged humans which populate the screen have the intelligence of a protozoan, a two-dimensional creature. They do not sense danger; danger is detected by their cognitive apparatus only when the shot is fired at them, or when the club makes contact with the skull. Even the dumbest Hollywood movies of the '30s, when picturing a group fighting for survival, be it against nature or other people, always emphasized cunning, however primitive; taking conscious advantage of external circumstances was perceived as an element of the struggle, a connection between some individual skills, or aptitudes, and the physical assault. Neither the Warriors nor their persecutors ever attain this stage of human evolution: they do not think, they react, they are the final and logical conclusion of the Gestalt psychology, radical sociological theories, est, *Playboy's* and Peoples Temple's "philosophy." Why their "reactions" prove victorious over the "reactions" of their enemies, who have equally, if not better developed arm muscles and more bicycle chains, is never explained or rationalized.

Watching the New York of this movie, not a *soupçon* crosses one's mind that it's a place where Columbia University, Chase Manhattan, Caravelle Restaurant, Carnegie Hall, the *New York Times,* Ladies' Garment Workers Labor Union, and even Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. could *also* exist. The love story is handled by a dialogue of grunts: "You're a tough chick . . ."; "Yeah?"; "Yeah . . ."

The social angle, even if interpreted in the trivial socialist-realistic terms with which the liberal critics once assessed *Blackboard Jungle, Hells Angels,* or *West Side Story,* is gone. Today, they approach *The Warriors* with words like "mystery play," "fantasy," "eerie beauty," "New York nocturno," "choreography of violence," "a punk fable." Pauline Kael, an insipidly garrulous and the most venerated of the libcultists in movie criticism, wrote:

> "The story, which has a classic shape and suggests the *Odyssey,* is actually Xenophon's *Anabasis* retold in modern urban terms . . ."

With an equally "critical" insight she can claim that *Valley of the Dolls* is the other side of *Magic Mountain,* that Dick Tracy has "something" in common with Achilles, while Lucullus and Jackie Gleason are one—as they both like to eat. A *Village Voice* contributor was more succinct. He confessed:

> "On the surface, *The Warriors* is cowboys and Indians, and, to this viewer, the most lovingly moral and beautiful film of the past year."

* * *

Movie, Movie is a leisurely little spoof of the American movies of the '30s—their ethos, philosophy, morality and ideals. All these fit neatly into one vocable—glamour—and this is exactly what movies tried to make out of the American worldview throughout the '30s. As we all know, virtue and skill were always rewarded in those movies; it was, perhaps, at variance with life and truth, but as we can now see with painful clarity, it performed certain social and civilizational functions that we sorely miss in today's reality.

Movie, Movie is a spoof with something to ponder: the social force of melodrama. In the '30s melodrama became tantamount to Americanism. It didn't validate any values, but it didn't annihilate any either. The truth or untruth of the prizefighter's story in *Movie, Movie* is irrelevant. What counts is the social effect of its cultural imagery on yesteryear's everydayness. When a childish, even dimwitted, apotheosis of bravery was put to good use, it had a force to determine the victorious Americanism, so instrumental only a few years later. Thus, an unsupportable simplism was in fact a carrier of a certain inner, even higher, truth that could act as a social cohesive. Both the Shakespearean or Molierean *deus ex machina* had the same function at the time when the classics were pop art. Still, in the '30s we could buy Popchik's instant and miraculous transmutation from a boxer to a lawyer, and the narrative consequences of this metamorphosis. If in the second part of *Movie, Movie* a fledgling composer writes a show in one night and becomes the instant New York matinee idol, it is quite okay that a moronic pugilist could acquire a law degree just in time to prosecute his archenemy and villain. Detractors call this a dream factory or Hollywood's big lie. They are right, but miraculously enough, somewhere, sometime schmaltzy untruth began to coexist with truth in America in such a way that plenty of social profit resulted. Even if people only wanted to be superficially as good as those in the movies, such a synergic mass inclination could improve a civilization. And, after all, isn't it something terrifyingly American that in one night a successful show is written here and there? □

Music

Establishment as Avant-Garde

by John Hastings

"They never forgave me!"

The words—in a letter—were those of a leading twentieth century composer. His name: Ernest Bloch.

Who were "they"? And what transgression was so unforgivable?

Bloch was referring to the collective response—not by the public but by many of his professional contemporaries—to his "America Rhapsody." This is the work that, by a unanimous verdict of the judges, had been awarded the *Musical America* prize in 1926. An "epic"

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tone-poem saga of the Republic from its earliest years to the present and invoking the spirit (as it was dedicated to the memory) of Walt Whitman and Abraham Lincoln, "America" is an unapologetically emotional tribute to what, for Bloch, was the essential greatness of a democratic nation. It closes with an anthem, the theme of which is progressively developed throughout the course of the work, which Bloch hoped might replace the unsingable "Star-Spangled Banner": a paean of praise for the American dream and an outpouring of love and devotion by the common man. For any *haute couture* advantages it had three things against it: (1) it was unabashed "program music"; (2) it was patriotic; and, worst of all (3) it was intended to appeal not to a musical elite but to *people.*

By "serious composers" this kind of thing simply wasn't done. One didn't —least of all in terms of patriotism— write for the unsophisticated "layman": it was a kind of gentleman's agreement. To countermand such a policy—above all, so directly and with such passion—was to be guilty of a grandstand play that, in effect, contemptuously bypassed the elite's esthetic/ideological rules and regulations. In short, to speak to the ordinary man in terms he could understand was, esthetically, to commit —amalgamated into one—the seven deadly sins. And when, in addition to this unseemly recognition of the lower orders, one committed the further musico-esthetic depravity of intentional "program music," then one must, for one's wickedness, be cast into the outer darkness. As subsequent history attests, Ernest Bloch—to an extraordinary and incredible extent—was.

Have "times changed"? One may well ask, has the "liberal culture" matured? Let's look back. If comparisons are invidious, so be it. That was an age when, in music and the other arts, "progress" was viewed as an idea to be pursued in a straight, undeviating path "forward" regardless of where it led. In the musical orthodoxy of the day willful, witless and arbitrary indeterminism was the way, the truth and the light—and no departure from that orthodoxy was to be countenanced by the foundations, played by symphony orchestras or given other than short shrift by critics, most of whom, as declamatory spokesmen of the *soi-disant* "avant-garde," were, by their allegiance to an orthodoxy, what they excoriated in others: academic. Typical of this '30s/'40s establishment's "thinking" was a highly touted book written by one of America's foremost composers: it presumed to lay down the law as to how the serious composer was to dedicate himself to "his time." The message came through loud and clear: the composer would (if he knew what was good for him?) devote himself, in mode of expression, to a totally "forward look" ("sound"?), as the mouthpiece of his immediate temporal circumambience. Which meant, in practical application, conforming to prescribed antidiatonic modalities, whether dodecaphonic serialism, electronicism, the aleatory peregrination or the kind of pseudonimity typified by John Cage. And, it must be said, a staggering preponderance of the "serious composers" of the time—while they would not, of course, have admitted it (thinking themselves revolutionaries)—rushed to obey the authoritarian prescription. How could they, with all that pseudoinsurgent ardor, have known that they were doomed to sound in our day like quaint antiques? For when their "time" died the "expressors" of the "time" died with it. Did anyone except themselves really think they wouldn't?

What of today? Having just come through the Age of Boulez, we have, possibly, a fresh perspective on the modernism of which that gentleman is still the high priest. In any event, following his departure from the conductorship of the New York Philharmonic, the *New York Times* published an article signaling the decline, if not fall, of the musical "avant-garde." If this, patently, did not mean that the death grip of music's nihilists had been appreciably weakened, it could be interpreted as a sign that, with its 60-year-plus indifference to boredom in sound, the public was in clear agreement that such nihilists were not, as had long been their posture, "the wave of the future." This could only signify that the public is now less disposed to continue its stance of hitherto polite and pseudo-respectful toleration.

What of the future? The question is unanswerable as long as composers meekly submit to, and therefore perpetuate, the tyranny of their pseudo-futurist mentors. "Dare to fail!" one yearns to call out to these composers— "You don't," in Bloch's words to an apprentice tenant in the atonal straitjacket, "have to compose like that, you have talent!" For, surely, what some of today's composers lack is less ability than true insurgency buttressed by intestinal fortitude. But, it may be asked, why should it be assumed that today's composer *wants* to write otherwise than so many do? To which there can be but one reply. Pusillanimous play-it-safers many such composers ostensibly are; stupid, tone-deaf and heartless not all can be labeled. They, too, have watched the prolonged and continuing failure of extreme modernism to win a supportive public, the dismal record of conformist composers, past a first performance, in earning a second; and the hegemony of musical authorities in banning music the educated and judicious listener might welcome. Further, treacherous the professional musical scene may be; murky it is not: the power elite has crystalline exposure. And composers know the score, both that of the reigning oligarchy and that of the public's rejection. And it would seem a fair bet that someday soon a genuine and vitally unregenerate nonconformist talent will elect to leap the rapids and come through to slake the thirst of a long-parched public.

What can stiffen the backbone of the true rebel against this oligarchy? A better understanding of the values involved? Possibly. What does a vital

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composer want? Not the sterile professional/musicological ingrainment that can only be creative incest; not acceptance solely by a sequestered elitist coterie. He wants to be heard and responded to by an enlightened public; to be recognized as a viable, creative force; to be a communicative voice. Toward this end he is urged to give the most serious consideration to the following:

(1) A thoughtful reading of Henry Pleasants' *The Agony of Modern Music* (still these many years after its first publication the definitive statement of the bankruptcy of the musical "avant-garde"—whose thesis has yet to be refuted: that "serious" music has long since committed a totally unnecessary suicide and only popular music [particularly jazz] has survived in our time with a dynamic life of its own);

(2) That today's so-called "serious" music is, and has long been, stalled at the point that, for literature, was simply a passing phase, "the revolution of the word" (the basic premise of which before its expiration in the late '30s was that for all "serious" writing, the traditional word, traditionally spelled and with its traditional meaning still relatively intact, was forever dead)—and that if one creative art can survive a seeming Armageddon/Apocalypse/Millennium so can another;

(3) That extreme modernism is (a) a contemporary form of puritanism, with puritanism's characteristic proscription of pleasure; and (b) a form of arrogant censorship that bans forms, harmonies and structures still found viable by the free spirit among composers—those unrestricted, that is, by doctrinaire rule and regulations;

(4) That the tired old argument that the "new" is always rejected by its time (the routine procedure is to cite certain contemporary resistances to Beethoven and Wagner and Stravinsky) is inapplicable to today's so-called "avant-garde" for two reasons: first, today's "avant-garde" is not an insurgency but an entrenched academy from which dissenters are rigorously excluded and, second, the opponents of the Beethovens, Wagners, etc. were professional critics, whereas opponents of today's Henzes, Ligetis and Druckmanns are the public—leading to one conclusion: the one to mistrust, today quite as yesterday, is not the educated concertgoer but the *épater-le-bourgeois* reviewer;

(5) That all the technological expertise and virtuosity, all the musicological precepts and principles in the world avail of nothing if (a) they carry no communication to the listener and for that reason (b) are irredeemably dull.

Come back, Ernest Bloch—while "all" may not "be forgiven" by your establishment adversaries, there are those of us who understand that when you composed your "America Rhapsody" you were not a different man from him who composed your Second String Quartet, which Ernest Newman called "worthy to stand beside the last quartets of Beethoven." □

The American Scene

Mr. Unclean?

Governor Jerry Brown of California has a reputation of being a political opportunist. Opportunism is not a political sin in America, but neither is it a virtue. It can be redeemed by other qualities; it can also generate a lot of popular contempt.

But rhetorical and tactical opportunism, even personal prevarication, is one thing, while hobnobbing with scum is another. In the February issue of *High Times,* we found Governor Brown's article. It was about exploration of space, to be sure, but written for *High Times* and prominently signed. We think it abominable. To make it clear why, a few words about the magazine.

Its ideology is encapsulated in an ad featuring a bikini-clad girl who assumes a body position which at best can be termed nonchalant. The ad reads:

> "Expose myself? Why not, if I know what I'm doing. Sure, it's easy to close yourself off to experience, cover up, withdraw from life. Safe. But I choose life. I want to open up to sights, sounds, tastes, smells, feelings . . . That's why I expose myself to drugs . . ."

High Times is totally, even fanatically, devoted to peddling narcotics. Its circa 130 pages of glossy and seductive representations relentlessly push marijuana, cocaine, hashish, psychedelic pills—for which the code word in the text is "recreational drugs." Its editors, illustrators and writers spread before the reader's eyes an El Dorado existence if only he dips into the pool of his own befouled consciousness. They promise the paradise of unfathomable delights for the price of simple addiction. Their victims are hundreds of thousands of American adolescents. The editors and photoreporters never venture to the rehabilitation centers where their victims shiver away their youth, or to the hospitals where they die. Why the Trans-High Corporation, which publishes *High Times,* wants to exterminate young Americans—purely for profit or on assignment by some unnamed forces—is never made clear. Governor Brown did not ask this question either before submitting his contribution.

He seems to disregard the lesson of Mr. Gerald Ford, a decent but embarrassingly simple-minded man. While President of the United States, Mr. Ford

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refused to meet Mr. Solzhenitsyn, but hobnobbed with Andy Warhol and Mick Jagger's wife—eminent representatives of Manhattan's jet-set dregs. This played a role in his rejection by the American people. Tolerance, even the liberal insouciance of companionship, is one thing, but chumminess with *canaille* is another. One may discuss worldviews with a communist in Russia, but one does not fraternize with the Gulag henchmen. The *High Times* crowd, to even the most unprejudiced mind, are counterculture's poisoners and executioners. We hope Governor Brown will learn it when his day of reckoning arrives.

McGovernitis

"Seven years later, his ideas have taken root," announces the *Chicago Tribune* in an adulatory article, proving that the American press has not yet recovered from the disease. And the article admiringly admits that the Carter administration is replete with "undersecretaries and assistants to deputies and administration aides who learned their politics at McGovern's feet."

Indeed, it is. The State Department is infested with them, so are countless agencies and the White House itself. Their impact on the American political reality, at home and abroad, is nefarious. To make it clear, let's re-examine what those worthy engineers of American policies have learned at McGovern's feet, and what Carter has enabled them to put into operation.

Senator McGovern certainly does not want communism for America, but he sincerely considers it an honorable ideological enterprise elsewhere. He deems oppression and penury for Cubans, Poles and Vietnamese an acceptable, even worthy, proposition—as, he thinks, it departs from a sound premise and its totalitarian excesses are just mistakes and aberrations of a morally valuable doctrine. He also thinks that it is America who is to blame for the lack of universal harmony, and it is enough to disarm ourselves and give to the Russians and Chinese whatever they want to achieve a just and equitable peace among nations. Thus, in Chile he would rather see Allende than Pinochet, even if the latter, his "mistakes" notwithstanding, has more backing by Chileans than the former, and has markedly improved the conditions of the country. He would prefer a communist Rhodesia to the one that now seems to be emerging, visibly characterized by the first successful, interracial cooperation in all of Africa—and those at the State Department, who once sat at his feet, do all they can to satisfy the Master's feelings and bring about a communist victory. And, of course, before that they made his heart rejoice by giving Angola, Afghanistan and Laos to those politically honest visionaries who Mr. McGovern trusts and respects.

In home policies, the Senator passionately affirms his sentiments for the poor and the needy, a commendable inclination, but one that arouses some suspicions. We suspect that he is more ardently in love with his own sociopolitical stance on poverty than with a practical program for help. We are all for making this nation better off and eradicating misery and want—we just do not think that the solutions offered by the Senator's conscience would do any good. After all, they have been continuously applied to the American society since the Kennedy era and they do not appear to be succeeding. The monument of decency from South Dakota is branding our objection as greed, callousness, exploitation, etc. However, those who now implement "his ideas" via the Carter administration, have succeeded in bringing about the collapse of the dollar and anarchic inflation. Carter's disjointed duplicity has given them more power than even their idol's victory in 1972 would have. But that's another story, or area of investigation into which the *Chicago Tribune,* faithful to its liberal proclivities, would never venture. □

Journalism

Chicago Tribune's Parochialism

What's a critic?

It's — among others — a *Chicago Tribune* newspaperperson who reports on what new jazz albums have been released (she is a jazz "critic"), the cost of a ticket to a rock concert (she is a pop or rock "critic"), or the yearly sales of record companies and whether taxicabs should stop in front of discos (he is a night-life "critic," a bizarre occupation which should by no means be confused with your friendly Salvation Army preacher, excoriating the big city vices).

Why does the *Chicago Tribune* use this pompous denomination for a journalistic hack? Why are simple, routine, reportorial texts christened criticism? Most likely, to look more serious and sophisticated in the eyes of unserious and unrefined consumers. The *Chicago Tribune* also has a restaurant, or food "critic"—and here's where the real burlesque of meanings and notions begins. Criticism is an intellectual discipline for judging according to a *criterion*—that is, an objectively established measure of value. It involves standards and rules of rational, moral and social nature, and it turns into art when subjective variables and imponderables become indispensable for the act of judgment. Nominally, it can be argued that a food critic may exist; however, taste, or the preference of the palate, is such a subjective, even lyrical, part of humanness that the opinion of someone who is hired by a newspaper to elaborate on the aroma of broccoli sounds like an imbecilic joke. An art critic who defends Picasso against ignorant dislikes can always resort to objectively, socially, or even scholarly, verifiable arguments. Food "critics" write meticulously that the asparagus is deliciously soggy, or the kebab is grilled to perfection, or the chateaubriand has a metallic flavor

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because it was apparently sliced with an improperly shaped knife—and all such is both pitiable and meaningless drivel to someone who does not give a damn about asparagus, or knows himself what to think about his kebab. The noun "critic" is associated in English with names like Dr. Johnson, Coleridge, Carlyle, Matthew Arnold, and in French with Diderot, Sainte-Beuve, Renan. In the *Chicago Tribune's* parlance, it means someone who informs you that at a certain address spinach and noodles are served as side dishes. In New York newspapers there are also journalists who write about eateries, but they are tactful enough to call themselves food editors, or reviewers. It's the best proof of the *Chicago Tribune's* doleful and deep-seated provincialism that it feels a need to call its scribblers "critics."

The *Chicago Tribune* also employs a movie "critic." He is a reviewer who dutifully tells the plot of the movie, reports on its production cost, gossips about its actors, ventures into the realm of judgment by announcing that he found the movie good or bad, that he liked it or not. He interviews "stars," too. Being of ultraliberal persuasion, he favors actors of radical-pinkish hues and Jane Fonda is his darling. One could presume that, as a "critic," he would apply an objective analysis and judgment to the Fonda phenomenon, but his critical faculties conspicuously fail him in front of that lady. He is mightily supported by his editor-in-chief's wholesome sense of criticism, who would never assign anyone to interview Professor Thomas Molnar, but who features cover page blow-ups of Ms. Fonda's physiognomy over and over again. Which, as the industry knows, is the archliberal practice of "critical" publicity, only a bit discriminatory and selective.

Ms. Fonda is a person of extreme mental arrogance. Through her cinematic celebrity status Ms. Fonda has a synergic effect on the American democratic culture as she peddles her mixture of ideological ignorance, meanness and emotionality. She is a cog in a vile mechanism of dispensation of influences which makes a narrow-minded leftism, blended with a hubris of unexamined feelings, the reigning mood of the popcultural supermarket. But the *Chicago Tribune's* "critic" does not even try to fashion his questions in order to probe and fathom the contradictory muddle of Ms. Fonda's soliloquies—like other liberal, but honestly serious, interviewers would do. He does not ask her about a movie entitled *Introduction to the Enemy,* produced in North Vietnam. In it, Ms. Fonda recited lines and enacted allegiances, for which an actor in Hungary, Poland, or even Russia itself, would be considered by their own society a despicable tool of a vicious communist propaganda campaign. Even benign American liberals view such agitprop activity on behalf of the communist Big Lie with utter contempt, when it is performed by the Soviet apparatchiks. But the *Chicago Tribune* "critic" writes:

> "Prior to her political activism, she was just another body, albeit one with a familiar name. But now she stands alone as a fresh and particularly American actress. She has the spunk and independence we associate with our national character. Jane Fonda, so often accused of being anti-American, as an old-fashioned American actress? [the 'critic' asks rhetorically] She agrees with the analysis: 'I think I'm quintessentially American . . . I feel a commitment to my country . . . I'm moral . . . Yes, Americans are moral: it's been just that our leaders haven't been moral.' "

So much for what the *Chicago Tribune* understands of *criticism* and who its "critics" are. □

Us and *Them*

In an interview for *Vogue,* Mr. Halberstam, a reporter, writer and liberal media insider, announced:

> "That struggle over information began in the early 1960s—it was *us* versus the government . . ."

It's a peculiar sociopolitical philosophy. Mr. Halberstam seems to be oblivious to the idea that the U.S. government is a creation of the people's will—however unrepresentative and truncated this will may be as measured against democracy's modern deficiencies, manipulations and complexities. Such unequivocal drawing of lines creates a corresponding reality: the press against *us,* the people who chose the government—which, in fact has been pretty visible for at least two decades. The warping of the journalist's motivations and rationalizations is another story. Once, the journalist had a right to cast himself as a knight errant in the cause of truth. Since Watergate, he looks more and more to us like a hyena endlessly prowling for carrion. His actions seem to be motivated not by national interests, nor by society's rational needs, but by his own search for power, social and financial. Thus, if the journalist of today, as exemplified by Mr. Halberstam, thinks that just the government is against him he's mistaken. It is he versus all of us—and he'll feel it more and more in the coming years. Since the yellow press and the big city tabloids, the people of America have entertained a suspicion that, beneath all the stuffy rhetoric, the press serves their own interests *more* than the interest of the country. After the '60s, we all have an uneasy feeling that the media serve their own aggrandizement *only.* □

Persuasion At Work, Vol. II, No. 3, March 1979:

"THE COERCIVE UTOPIANS: THEIR HIDDEN AGENDA".

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Liberal Culture

Half-Truths and Social Conscience

The *Nation* has published an excerpt from a book by a certain Nora Sayre entitled *Cold-War Cinema.* In it, the authoress derides the grotesque crudeness and vulgarity of the Hollywood anticommunist movies of the '50s. Now, everybody knows that most of those movies were hopelessly simplistic and trivial, often to the point of idiocy. The question is, however—taking into account our present perspective—were they devoid of *any* truth? Or: Have their tawdry half-truths been verified by the unfolding of subsequent decades?

Ms. Sayre writes that in the notorious Warner Brothers picture *I Was a Communist for the FBI:*

> "The Communists also force a strike on the Pittsburgh steelworkers' union, and those who didn't join the picket line are beaten with steel bars wrapped in the *Jewish Daily Forward,* so that Jews will be blamed for the blood spilling."

Well, there is countless evidence that in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, etc., the communist secret services working to subjugate those countries had commissioned Jewish officers to perform the cruelest and bloodiest acts of persecution and torture, at the same time deliberately publicizing their Jewish identities through what came to be known in those societies as the "whispered propaganda." This tactic, or perversion, paid off handsomely 25 years later, when Moscow and the respective East European regimes decided to fan Streicher-style anti-Semitic campaigns in order to divert the people's wrath from Soviet oppression and failures. But Ms. Sayre has more to say about the same picture:

> "A [communist] leader says [in it], 'To bring about Communism in America, we must incite riots.' Hence the Communists try to inspire blacks to assault whites . . ."

It takes guts for an American journalist, even one so infatuated with her own leftism, to sarcastically intimate how unbelievable such an utterance must have been at that time. But the testimonies of black writers of the stature of Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison amply confirm that this kind of rhetoric, perhaps not so simplistic, was a routine agitprop force. There is a larger dimension to the problem too, namely: Can such a thing as good, honest, acceptable propaganda exist? The answer is not easy, but it can be deduced from some areas of thinking more refined than Ms. Sayre's. The admitted principle of every marxist-leninist is the hoary, banal "the end justifies any means" motto. What the primitive Hollywood movie of the '50s tried to do, the grossness of its language notwithstanding, was to somehow acknowledge this extremely dangerous cynicism of sociopolitical methods. Like all propaganda, it had to resort to half-truths, but somehow over the years, the half-truths proved to be quite painful verities, and today we know that, yes, the State Department and the American intellectual community swarmed with people ready to render services to the communists for various and often complex reasons. And that this readiness to serve a lethal totalitarian ideology was often motivated by noble sociomoral consideration, deeply grounded in the ethics of American liberty. And that the communists never hesitated for a moment to take advantage of these philosophical and political complexities in the interplay between the American conscience and the American system, and were, and are, ever ready to package their steel bars in slogans whose only instrumentality is to subvert. On the other hand, *their* propaganda never suffers from their own torments and conflicts between truth, half-truth and even the merest relation to fact. In *their* propaganda, Trotsky, Slansky and Rajk were agents of Hitler, or the CIA, had to be killed for "it," and were. Which makes us think that Hollywood's simplisms and platitudes of the '50s were good, honest and truthful, both by comparison and unrelatively.

Hyperbole, Anyone?

A sample of the *New York Times Book Review's* reviewing:

> "Judged in terms of the power, range, novelty and influence of his thought, Noam Chomsky is arguably the most important intellectual alive today."

We would argue. Noam Chomsky, to our mind, is a semanticist and linguist of some scholarly achievement. He is also a political half-wit, a procommunist radical, was a Viet Cong enthusiast during the Vietnam war, and can now watch the fruits of his exertions on TV, as people die attempting to escape the Indochina communist paradise he helped to establish. In the American cultural universe he's about as important as Muhammad Ali. This comparison may wrong Ali a bit. We can't help feeling intrigued that the *New York Times* would think otherwise.

Super Self-Righteousness

Mr. Frank McConnell, identified as "Associate Professor of English at Northwestern University," reviews *The Last Romantic: A Life of Max Eastman* in the *Chronicle Review,* a supplement to the *Chronicle of Higher Education.* We can find there the following dialectical *tour de force:*

> "Eastman, good American that he was, was always—not just in his later years—a pragmatist as well as a humanitarian. His passion (and it was real) for a better world to come was always a passion grounded in his

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poet's sense of the real life around him rather than in a firmly airy metaphysics. This habit of thought made him, during the 1930s, the ideal critic of the killing contradictions of Marxist theory, just as it made him, during the 1950s and '60s, a classic victim of capitalism's more vulgar claims to rightness. And O'Neill's book finally is revealing not only about the fascinating Eastman, but about the complex fate of so many other American radicals who ended their careers under the wings of HUAC, General Motors, or *Esquire.*"

Why "victim"? Why this jarring vocable in an otherwise reasonable text? Why does changing from a communist and radical into an anticommunist and conservative, which was Eastman's case, equate, in the intellect of an American liberal, with victimization, or dwarfing, of mind and conscience? Had he gone the other way, would Eastman also be "a classic victim" of marxism's vulgar claims to morality? What makes the tropism of the quintessential liberal rely so dolefully on the left side of the universe as the only source of light and warmth? Is not the indomitable self-righteousness in passing judgments, untainted by doubt or irony, growing into a sort of mental goiter on the left side of the American liberal psyche?

Lack of Education

Village Voice, in a vicious diatribe against neoconservatives, resorts to the ultimate insult:

> "The other problem for the neoconservatives is: do they have fun? The notion has generally prevailed down the years that sex is better on the left . . ."

Is that so?

Paris of Troy was a devout religionist. Solomon was a king, Cleopatra a queen. Petronius was a right-winger, if not a Birchist, his sexual orientation notwithstanding. Abelard a monk. Boccaccio was a courtier and an Establishment snob; so was Petrarch. Lucrezia Borgia was a princess, and the daughter of a pope. Othello was a career military man, who most likely would be with the Pentagon were he around today. Both Don Juan and Casanova were raving reactionaries. Moll Flanders was anything but politically committed. Count Vronsky was a staunch supporter of the Czar, Annunzio was a fascist (so was Duse), Rudolf Valentino a royalist. Clark Gable and Gary Cooper leaned toward Senator J. McCarthy, rather than the Hollywood Ten. To mention just a few better-known cases. □

Polemics & Exchanges

More on Altruism, Happiness & Redistribution of Wealth

by John A. Howard

It is hazardous for an observer of the human scene to take issue with a professional philosopher. Even so, I am moved to offer some comments in response to Tibor Machan's attempt to identify a *via media* between what he perceives as the two moral antipodes of our era—nihilism and altruism. He perceives both as the enemies of human happiness.

Granted that Mr. Machan's statement was a mere outline of a concept rather than a well-developed thesis, I find it difficult to accept his all-inclusive altruism as an entity which can be juxtaposed with nihilism or anything else. There are, I suggest, two main currents of belief which he seems to have lumped under the heading of altruism, but which are mutually incompatible. One is the position of certain critics of capitalism who are determined to redistribute wealth, power and privilege. This school of thought cannot be labeled altruism because its partisans do not insist that everyone be charitable and kindly toward everyone else. The requirement is to be imposed only on the well-to-do. Those at the other end of the spectrum are encouraged, instead, to demand a larger share of the pie, an encouragement often coupled with advice to use distinctly uncharitable techniques.

The other element of Mr. Machan's altruism seems to be Christianity, which does place obligations on everyone to be kindly and helpful to his neighbor. To assert, however, that Christian altruism is the enemy of happiness is to miss the point of Christianity. For the Christian, the only true happiness derives from living by Christian principles.

Mr. Machan suggests that the impossibility of fallible mortals being able to meet the standards of pure altruism may be the cause of the flowering of nihilism. While that thesis may have some merit, it conspicuously lacks a larger perspective, for it denies the meaning and the utility of an ideal. An ideal is a concept of perfection. The fact that a person cannot fully achieve it does not invalidate the usefulness of striving toward it. Even some philosophers reach toward a level of understanding that they may suspect is beyond their grasp.

Since the objective of Mr. Machan's formulation is to free the individual to pursue happiness, I can't help wondering if Mr. Machan has ever met anyone who pursued happiness and apprehended it. I have the impression that the few people one encounters who seem to be genuinely happy have acquired that status as a by-product of pursuing worthy goals of a magnitude beyond personal gratification. □

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